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MY SERVANT, CATHERINE

by

ARRIGO LEVASTI

Translated by

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TRANSLATOR'S FOREWORD

This is the English translation of Arrigo Levasti's book, *Santa Caterina da Siena*, which was published in Turin in 1947. It has already been translated into French and German, and acclaimed as a work of outstanding scholarship and profound piety. Only the translators can know how arduous has been the attempt to render in another language something of the sober elegance of the author's Italian prose.

Arrigo Levasti was born in Modena in 1886 and at an early age wandered on foot over the countries of Western Europe, an eager student of the art and culture of the various peoples he visited. He studied at the University of Bologna, where he attended the lectures of Carducci, and at the University of Florence.

Consistently anti-Fascist from the beginning to the end of the Fascist era, he could take no prominent position in Italian public life, but was well known as a student and teacher of religion and philosophy, with a specialised knowledge of subjects connected with mysticism. He has contributed to various Italian, French and German religious and philosophical journals, and to the Dominican Review *The Life of the Spirit*. For twenty years he was Director of the Philosophical Society of Florence, and he still lives in Florence, as Librarian of the American Library.

Among his published works are: *I Mistici*, an anthology of mystical writers of the world (Florence 1925); a new edition of a 14th-century text of the *Leggenda Aurea* of Jacopo da Voragine (Florence, 1926); *Sant' Anselmo* (Bari 1929) and *I Mistici del Duecento e del Trecento* (Milan 1935), an anthology of Italian mystics of the 13th and 14th centuries, with Introduction and Notes.

Santa Caterina is the creation of a lifetime of devoted study, and was completed during the most critical years of the last war, when the author was living in hiding in a Villa near Siena. In the Introduction he speaks with gratitude of his wife, who succeeded in preserving around him 'a serene atmosphere, in moments of anxiety and danger'.

For more detailed information the reader is referred to the *Dizionario della Letteratura Italiana* (Paravia, Turin, 1951) compiled by Renda-Operti, pp. 624-625.

D.W.

Chapter I

THE FAMILY OF GIACOMO DI BENINCASA

AS FAR as we know, Catherine was born in 1347. She was the twenty-third child, and a twin. A twenty-fifth and last child, also a girl, was born about two years later. We know very little about this enormous family.

The father, Giacomo di Benincasa, earned quite a good living as a dyer, was a peaceful and pious man, and exercised a sober and serene influence over his family. Understanding both the good and evil aspects of life, he always tried to find reasonable solutions for problems in dispute, was ever ready to forgive offences, mindful of God, and eager to deserve his place in Paradise. In 1346 he took his son Benincasa into partnership, and in 1368 he died and was buried in Camporegio.

The mother, Lapa, was daughter to Nuccio Piacenti, a quilt maker and poet. If the poems attributed to him are authentic, nothing of the melancholy that inspires them, nothing of their preciousness, was inherited by his daughter; but we may find the impulsive nature of Lapa, or even more, of Catherine herself, in the following lines:

E sento amor che fuor di me s'avventa
Per sí gran forza che mi vince tutto,
Che nol posso tenere . . .

[And I feel love breaking out of me,
With its strength overwhelming me—
So that I cannot hold it in . . .]

Lapa was born in 1306, was married, according to Laurent, between 1322 and 1325, and up to the year 1349 had such a succession of annual childbirths that she could only feed one of her children, and that one was Catherine. A woman of the people,

she often reproached her family violently and offensively, but she was a worthy hard-working woman. Immersed in her own daily round, she did not waste time in abstract discussions; she saw the world as a perpetual breeding-ground of numerous, prosperous and well-regulated families. She had common sense, a modest piety and a commonplace morality. It never occurred to her to try to control herself or to improve her nature. She was a creature of instinct, sad or gay, scolding or blessing as she suffered or rejoiced. An excessive talker, she was extravagant in feeling and her enthusiasms were as facile as her rages. Even when in her old age she became a Tertiary, she was neither patient nor detached from worldly considerations. She loved her children according to the flesh and 'took little things for big ones'. Her tenderness for her own children was extravagant, as Catherine was to tell her. In her impatience she was subject to depression and grief; she always wanted everything her own way. She would put up with her children's absence if they had left home to pursue wealth, but not if they had gone in search of spiritual activity. But she was good at heart, and succeeded in understanding others in the end, even if tardily and with difficulty, and, after grumbling, gave way to their wishes. That is why she became devout, and as an old woman, entered the Order and followed her holy daughter, whom she admired and revered. She survived Catherine and, according to Raimondo da Capua, lived to be eighty-nine.

In Catherine's life her brothers and sisters play a very minor part and, except for her sister Bonaventura, they move in the background as colourless figures who seem to have no influence over her, and do not help us to understand her. We do not even know the names of some of them, either because they died in infancy, or because no document records them. Of some the names only survive—of others we know a few facts.

Benincasa was the first born. He was a dyer too, and in 1346 was taken into partnership by his father. Unlike his brother Bartolo, he belonged to the 'popolo minuto'. For political or economic reasons he moved to Florence, and, with his brothers, was granted citizen's rights, by seventy-eight favourable votes to twenty-eight adverse. We do not know the name of his wife, who bore him several sons and daughters, but we know that one daughter died of the plague in Siena on August 5th, 1374. Three sons,

Sandro, Jacopo, and Andrea, were admitted to the Guild of Wool Workers in Florence on May 17th, 1391.

Bartolo was a follower of the Twelve, and according to the Comtesse de Flavigny, was one of the defenders of Siena in 1370, and later on in the same year we hear of him in Florence, where he was granted Florentine citizenship with his brothers Benincasa and Stefano. He also was a dyer, and worked with his brothers and their partner; but his affairs went so ill that in October 1373 the Commune of Florence demanded from Siena the payment of 875 florins, 6 soldi and 10 denari for his creditors. He died of the plague in Siena shortly before his children.

Stefano was not much older than Catherine. He also was a dyer, and belonged to the 'popolo minuto', and he too left Siena to become a Florentine citizen. He worked with his brothers, and endured the same hardships as Benincasa and Bartolo. In 1370 he was with them in Florence; in October of 1373 the Priors of the Guilds and the Gonfaloniere of Justice of the Florentine Commune declared him to be a 'deceased brother'. Perhaps he died in Rome, as Piero di Giovanni di Ventura tells us, during a pilgrimage to procure the indulgences attached to visits to the Basilicas and Sanctuaries of the City.

Not much is known of Catherine's sisters. Giovanna, her twin, died soon after birth, and another Giovanna, the last born, died and was buried in April 1363. Niccoluccia married a certain Palmerio di Nese delle Fonti, and Maddalena married Bartolomeo di Vannino. Nora is said to have died of the plague in 1374.

As far as Catherine is concerned, the most important figure is Bonaventura—the eldest sister, attractive, good, affectionate and pious. She married the dyer, Niccolò de' Tegliacci, and lived near the Gate of Sant' Ansano, remaining in constant touch with her old home. The author of the 'Miracoli' says that 'she had been vain and pleasure-loving like all young women', and represents her almost as a frivolous character. On the contrary, she was serious-minded. She nearly fell sick with dismay when she heard her husband's ribald jests with his men friends—for in her parents' house she had never heard such language. She said so frankly to Niccolò, adding that if this behaviour continued she would sicken, and might die of grief. No doubt she loved adornments and fine clothes—but in this she was within her rights. An excellent wife,

a loving daughter and sister—why should she not appear young and pleasing? Her religion did not forbid her to adorn herself, or to make herself beautiful. And she probably advised her younger sister to take pains about her person and adornments, to be graceful and charming—showing her how to gild her hair, and rouge her cheeks, how to appear agile and fresh and alluring. Catherine too was to be married—such was the natural order of things—then why not teach her to be pretty and elegant and pleasing? Such teachings could not fail to draw still closer the bonds of love between the sisters. Bonaventura and Catherine loved each other ‘most tenderly’. Such was their mutual understanding and affection that when in August 1362 Bonaventura died in childbirth and was buried in Camporegio, her death left a blank in Catherine’s soul—a sense of loss great enough to cause a profound religious crisis.

The biographers give us no account of the family life of the Benincasa, but we can imagine their way of life was orderly, hard-working, honest, prepared for some sacrifices, ruled by a sense of justice and some piety, but also a natural anxiety for material welfare.

Nothing outstanding or unusual about them. One of those numberless families of whom, once gone, no one ever speaks again, unless, as in this case, some extraordinary being is born in their midst.

Chapter II

‘CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH’

ST CATHERINE OF SIENA was born in no happy time for her native city. The year 1338, the ‘peaceful and happy year’ of the Sienese Republic, declined and ended. The next year the rising cost of living, together with an epidemic, drained the city of men and resources. ‘In Siena there was not a single good man left’, remarks Angelo di Tura sententiously. But from then onwards, until the great ‘Death’ of 1348, misfortunes, destruction, famine and pestilence followed one another. The seasons were adverse and the crops poor, the farmers left the fields untended, the mercenary ‘Companies of Fortune’ overran and laid waste the countryside, right up to the gates of Siena; the citizens chose to pay them ransom money rather than fight. In the city the famished populace revolted, but their clamours and rebellion were of no avail. Trade shrank, industry was at a standstill; the excellent Government of the Nine tried to help, to direct, to control where necessary, but it had no longer its old energy or political wisdom, and had only a few more years to live.

When, in April 1348, there was a violent outbreak of the black plague within the city itself, death came to almost every door, and those who were unscathed were ‘stupified’ with grief at the endless succession of deaths, and whenever possible fled terrified from parents, children, brothers, sisters, friends.

When we read in the Chronicles the brief vivid descriptions of this scourge in Siena, or in other cities of Italy, we shudder with fear even more than when reading the pages of Boccaccio: fear of fear itself, because the survivors were so terrified that they committed the most cowardly acts. No affection or sense of duty prevailed with men who seized upon any excuse to leave their next of kin a prey to their sickness, and escaped from the

house, locking the door behind them. The doctors did not attend the sick, or merely pretended to attend them so as to pocket their fees; the priests, at most, ministered only to the rich, for reward. There must have been acts of charity, unselfishness and courage, but most people thought only of saving themselves. 'The city of Siena seemed almost uninhabited . . . it is not possible with the tongue of man to describe this horrible state of affairs, and he may well count himself blessed who saw it not.'

The reaction that followed such widespread suffering may easily be understood. When the plague ended, men issued forth from the domain of terror. Everything they saw or heard seemed new-born. Was this a dream, or was the dream over now? Were the people one met really the living? And were the houses and streets really the same as a few weeks before? Everything seemed miraculous. The hills green with ilexes or silvery with olives shone with new light. The orchards and fields had a freshness never before observed, the sun was brighter, the air more clear. Life was good and to be enjoyed. The past months had been full of bitter tears; now for laughter and merriment. The suffering had been atrocious, but now was the time to rejoice to the full. Men's eyes, once dilated with despair, beamed with joy, for existence was safe again.

Class distinctions were wiped out, and as before all had shared in suffering, so now all shared in the pursuit of pleasure. 'All the survivors, whether friars, priests, nuns, or layfolk, gave themselves up to enjoyment, and did not hesitate to squander and to gamble; everyone indulged in eating and drinking, hunting, fowling and gambling.'

Life's flame leapt higher. The senses must rule; the dead, suffering, morality, religion—all must be forgotten; life must renew itself in the satisfaction of repressed desires.

A class of 'new rich' had sprung up. Doctors, pharmacists, grave-diggers, poultry-dealers, dealers in cloth and linen to enshroud the dead, woolworkers, those who had prepared plasters and potions of mallows, nettles and herbs, sugar and sweet merchants, priests, friars—all who had survived, and these were less than half the population—had money to spare, for they had been paid for their services or their goods ten times their usual price, and now they were eager to spend their easy profits in

satisfying their every whim. They coveted the pleasures of the rich, their possessions, their way of life, their amusements.

Such moral disorder, however, could not last long. Gradually the turbulent passions subsided, the wasted energies needed calm to recreate themselves, the indulgence of the senses brought satiety. Men went back to reflecting and reasoning; order was restored, life resumed its natural course with its barriers and limitations.

Catherine's family, or most of them, had survived the famine and the plague. Catherine, nursed in her babyhood by her own mother, was cared for and brought up at home. Since October 1346 the family had occupied the house and dye-works in the parish of San Pellegrino, in the Fontebranda ward of the city. The little girl grew up lively, pretty and attractive, rather talkative, and with an understanding beyond her years. The neighbours admired her, and called her Euphrosyne, probably because she often spoke enthusiastically of this virgin, about whom she had heard in a sermon, or in old tales of the Saints—or because she used to say that she wanted to be like Euphrosyne herself. She soon learned her prayers, and showed an awakening piety. As she went up and down the stairs of her house she would recite Hail Marys and genuflect at every step, according to an ancient Irish custom that had spread to Siena.

The churches attracted her; 'when she was still very small she loved to go to the churches and all holy places'. The various services, the incense, music, singing and the sermons worked on her childish spirit; we can imagine her, full of wonder, following the liturgical rites and delighting in the sweet response they aroused in the rhythm of her own soul. In church she must already have felt, even if confusedly, that there was another and loftier life than that of the family, while earth and heaven mingled in her childish imagination. This is an enchanted mood we often find in children of every age, and sometimes it determines their future vocation, but often marks but a passing phase.

Catherine's mind was, however, naturally religious, and what she felt as a little child was not at all a momentary experience, but the natural development of her spiritual life. Soon there were outward signs of her innermost feelings, and at the age of seven she had her first vision: 'It happened one day when she was seven years old that her mother called her, saying: "Catherine, go to your

married sister and take your brother with you"—(this brother was a little older than Catherine) and she gave her an errand. Now one stretch of the road was without houses on either side. As she came back along this lonely stretch, her brother being some way in front of her, she was walking with her eyes raised to the sky when suddenly she saw in the air, not very high above the ground, a "loggia", not very large, full of bright light, in which she seemed to see Christ arrayed in dazzling white, robed like a bishop, with a pastoral staff in His hand. He smiled at the little girl, and there came from Him a shaft of light, like a sunbeam, which fell upon her. Behind Christ stood several men in white, all of them Saints, among them St Peter, St Paul and St John, as she had seen them painted in the churches.'

For Catherine this was an extraordinary vision. As we consider it coolly and from a distance, we see how attentively she must have observed her painted Saints, and how constantly her thoughts were set on holy things, but the child who experienced the vision must have been aware of the supernatural flooding into her soul.

It happens sometimes that concrete things actually seen are transposed or superimposed on abstract ideas that have been the subject of thought. The Christ who appeared before her in infinite splendour may have proceeded from her memory of painted Christs that she had seen. So may the bishop, though he may also have been a child's idealised image of a bishop seen during the services in the Cathedral of Siena, his pastoral staff in his hand, and his robes shining in the glimmer of the lighted candles. For us this explanation is possible, but the person who sees the vision, and all the more so when this is a little girl of seven, cannot but believe in a supernatural vision. Which of us, moreover, at the sudden sight of such radiant sunlight, with such dazzling whiteness and far-flung splendour, would not be struck with wonder and believe himself to be affected by some other-worldly phenomenon? We can therefore understand the astonishment of Catherine's soul, and why she could not tear herself away from her vision.

Her brother, seeing that she did not follow him, turned back, called her, went up to her and angrily shook her, to make her answer him. She only said: 'Go away. I will not come.' The little girl looked up to the sky again, but the vision had gone. The childish soul felt a pang at this brusque re-awakening to every-

day life; fear gripped her heart, and she was very thoughtful.

How much influence did this vision have on Catherine's life? Probably she owed to it her first awareness of her future religious life. The child meditated on her vision and on its consequences. Was it good or evil? For some time she mentioned it to no one, but her thoughts were always there. 'And from that hour onwards, she felt pain in her heart, an anxiety, a remorse of conscience, and a fear lest she should sin, as much as was possible at her tender age.' Scruples, vague doubts, fears, hopes, relaxations, all were now felt with relation to her vision. There was something new, something more mature, in her, and the smile of Christ, more felt than seen, had predestined her to prayer and penitence.

At once she sought solitude, the primary need of all creators. In solitude problems are solved, ideals take shape, inspirations are born, in contact with the eternal and the infinite. All sublime poetry, all decisive philosophy, is born in solitude. Catherine felt this instinctively, without being consciously aware of it. She was only a child, she hoped that Christ would appear to her again, would smile again, perhaps speak—but in public she would have been ill at ease, so she wanted to be alone. And she wanted to pray. Prayer did not then mean to her strife, self-control, intimate contrition, but concentration. And concentration only came in solitude. 'And she always contrived to be alone, whenever she could seize a moment to escape from the eyes of her father and mother and other kin, to recite her Paternosters and Ave Marias.'

The solitude she found amid her family was not enough. She wanted every hour for herself, to pray and meditate without end. Had there not been hermits, masters of their own time and entirely dedicated to prayer and holy colloquies? She had often heard of hermits and anchorites. The 'Fathers of the Desert', or their lives in 'The Golden Legend', were the favourite spiritual pasture of the devout of her day, and contained the 'exempla' quoted by the preachers. These lives were attractive, aroused desire, tearful sympathy, enthusiasm. Their obscurities suggested mystery, their disregard of natural laws delighted the imagination. A sense of kindness, of humanity, was not lacking. Their mixture of profane and sacred, of real and ideal, adventurous and contemplative, atrocious and touching, with colour effects now dark, crude or heavy, now light, golden or evanescent, charmed the

mediaeval mind. These Lives often contained praises of solitude, which was just what Catherine was looking for—so she was more and more taken with this idea. The tales heard in sermons or readings become so suffused with her own imagination that she thought of them as her own experiences. She decided to put into practice her ideal of living a hermit's life.

One day she took a little bread and set out again on the road to her sister Bonaventura's house, and went on beyond the Gate of Sant' Ansano. In her little head was the notion that out there was the desert, and that one might live there as a hermit. When the buildings ceased and she found herself in the open country she walked a little further, and behold! 'certain little dells and grottoes as if hidden from people's gaze'. For her this was the desert, and here she must stay. She went to an overhanging cliff, and entered a sort of grotto. Now she was happy! With 'a fervour of measureless love' she prayed to Christ—but the vision did not return. She prayed and prayed again: still solitude and silence—no vision. She appealed to the Virgin, the gentle Madonna whose image on the altars she had so often venerated, who can obtain from God all that she wills—still no answer to her desire. Her love found still more powerful expression, her pleadings became more insistent. Why did Christ not appear? Why could she not rejoice in that smile that still lingered in her memory? Where was that radiance that had shone in Vallepiatta but a short while ago? She had moments of absolute faith, others of discouragement. Prayers gave place to meditation. then to a consideration of her own state, then to hope and prayer once more. Between her prayers she ate her bread, seated on the ground. Her burning ardour was followed by an imploring appeal to be allowed to see Christ again, radiant as before. But instead of the vision something quite unexpected happened. Little by little Catherine felt herself raised above the ground, and, according to Raimondo da Capua, up to the roof of the grotto. Why? What did this mean? It was a phenomenon of levitation that she could not possibly understand; in fact it aroused her diffidence and fear. She thought it was the work of the devil. When she returned to the ground her simple childish confidence had gone. The reality of living seized her once more. It was evening, she was hungry, far from her parents; terrified, she decided to return at once to Fontebranda. She left

her grotto and ran swiftly, as on winged feet, to Porta Sant' Ansano, and thence to her home. Her mother asked her no questions, which leads us to suppose, knowing Lapa's watchful anxiety, that on leaving the house she had said she was going to her sister Bonaventura.

Catherine was rather unhappy and very disillusioned when she re-entered her home. The hermitage experiment had not succeeded, she thought, through her own fault. Had she not loved God enough, or not been sufficiently pure, or perhaps not yet suffered enough for Christ? Moreover, she found herself for the first time confronted by the devil's work, and she decided she must defeat him by subduing her own body.

She had certainly heard about the mortifications of the Saints, she knew that monks and friars scourge themselves, she may have known some *Disciplinati*—several companies of these were in Siena—who alternated their Lauds with flagellations. And had she not seen paintings of the scourging of Christ, bleeding and patient under suffering, so extolled by the preachers? She determined to scourge herself.

She began by whipping herself with a little cord; then she persuaded some other little girls to join her, and they used to meet in the most hidden corners of the house to pray and to discipline themselves. She directed the little group, decided how many *Paternosters* and *Avemarias* they should recite, and how many blows they should inflict. Scourging and prayers that for most of these children were a game—an earnest and painful game, it is true—that left hardly any serious trace in their souls. Probably most of them later on fell in love with some young man, and the fervour for Christ cooled and the mortifications were soon forgotten; for Catherine instead they were a necessary means to further her own dedication to God, and to win back the longed-for vision. She scourged herself, ate less, prostrated herself and prayed very much—and, in an impulsive outburst, said to Christ: 'My Lord Jesus Christ, I promise Thee and give Thee my virginity, that it may ever be Thine alone, and that Thou mayst ever be guardian of my purity.'

Padre Taurisano thinks that this vow was uttered during her first Communion; this may be so, but no document proves it. We observe however that, after this vow, Catherine's abstinences

increased methodically, which may mean that she found a guide in her pious practice, possibly Fra Angelo Adimari, mentioned as her first confessor in the *Chronicles of Santa Maria Novella* of Florence. Of this Dominican we only know that he was in Siena in 1352. Perhaps Catherine began going to confession when she was five or six, but not always to the same priest, and if Adimari heard her confessions sometimes he probably paid no greater heed to them than to those of other little girls, all in love with Jesus. He may have given her some practical advice, which she carefully followed. In any case, from this time onwards her asceticism became more systematic, and she seems to have entered the Dominican sphere of action. She was most frequent in attending the church of San Domenico in Camporegio and learnt about the life and work of St Dominic, while her love and veneration for the Preaching Friars were such that she would kiss the ground where they passed. She was fascinated by the Order's apostolic work; she also wished to save souls, and so she desired to become a Dominican. Remembering Euphrosyne who entered a monastery disguised as a young man, she tried to think how she could follow her example; but she made no attempt to do this, knowing already how to curb her impulsive nature.

The child's religiosity either escaped her family's notice, or was considered a childish infatuation that would disappear as soon as she became a woman. Catherine neither told her experiences nor divulged her thoughts, and her parents did not bother to enquire into the state of her soul. It was quite right and proper that she should spend a lot of time in church, and her natural goodness was something to be thankful for. Her family saw her little, but observed that she was merry and content, did what she was told, gave no cause for complaint and seemed to be growing up satisfactorily. What more could they expect? Every now and then she showed a wisdom beyond her years, but they did not pay much attention to that. We learn that only once was her mother surprised at Catherine's answers. One day Lapa sent her to take a Mass offering to the parish of Sant' Antonio, and instead of returning immediately she remained there to hear the Mass. When she re-entered her house her mother met her with: 'Cursed be the evil tongues that said you would never come back!' A pause, and then her daughter replied: 'My lady mother, when I do

less or more than what you require of me I beg you to beat me as much as you will, so that I may be more careful another time; this is your right and your duty; but I beg you not to let your tongue curse other folk, whether good or bad, for my shortcomings, because that would not befit your age, and would grieve me too much.'

This is Catherine's first real success in her family, perhaps a modest one but indicating considerable moral strength. Raimondo da Capua makes a great deal of it: 'Her parents are surprised, her brothers and sisters wonder at her, the whole family is astounded to hear such wisdom at such a tender age.' We may smile at this 'astounded' but the fact remains that Catherine replied in no common manner for a little girl of ten. She must by this time have already reflected on the souls to be saved, all worthy of our love, and therefore not to be scandalised. Her first success was based on a simple reference to our common humanity, uttered firmly and energetically.

Nothing new occurred in Catherine's life until she was twelve, at which age Sieneſe girls were kept at home while their parents busied themselves in the search for their future husbands. A time of anxiety for the mothers, of rosy dreams of love for the young maidens. All their thoughts were of a man who should bring them happiness and be endowed with the best material and moral qualifications. They awaited with trembling joy their future bridegroom, and thinking of him their hearts beat more quickly and their awakening senses quickened their blood. The mothers observed these changes in their daughters, their new desires and the unfolding of their life, and rejoiced: their own mission was being fulfilled according to the natural law: new families were soon to be created, and the generations would follow one another in their monotonous yet varied rhythm.

Lapa, like other mothers, began to instruct Catherine about preparations for marriage. She must wash her face more frequently, arrange her hair prettily, dress gracefully and present herself with a certain coquetterie. Women were born to become mothers of families, they must strive to please the bridegroom of their parents' choice, and this they could not do if they were untidy or illkempt. Catherine listened tranquilly and continued to live as before. Her disappointed mother must often have repeated her counsel about

caring for her looks, making herself attractive, thinking of her future as a bride and as the joyful mother of children. Lapa was brusque and impetuous, but for her daughter's sake she found a mother's gentle words and continued patiently in her instructions. All to no effect. Lapa became more and more disappointed, anxious, bewildered, not knowing how to enter her daughter's confidence or move her or convince her. She had no natural gift for understanding other natures different from her own, and no persuasive power. Her insistence only made Catherine more impassive, for she neither argued nor contradicted, just listened and remained unchanged. Even Lapa herself realised her own powerlessness.

But in family life a daughter's marriage is too important a project to be abandoned so soon, and Lapa, in fact, would not give in. Where she had not succeeded another might, so she enlisted the help of her daughter Bonaventura, of whom Catherine was very fond. As a newly wedded wife herself she might more easily gain her younger sister's confidence, and succeed where Lapa had failed.

The affectionate relations between the two sisters became more close. Her mother had been begging Catherine to dye her dark chestnut hair the blonde colour so much admired by young Sienese men, but it was Bonaventura who persuaded her finally to tinge it gold; Lapa had talked to her about clothes, embroideries, rouges, hair styles and adornments, but it was Bonaventura who got her to use powder and rouge, follow the fashion and, as the preachers say, cultivate the 'vanities of women'. She succeeded, Raimondo da Capua tells us, 'in various ways, both by example and by word'. He tells us no more, and we must guess the rest. What is certain is that the younger sister's religious fervour declined, and very probably Bonaventura was rejoicing in the thought that, sooner or later, she would persuade her to get married. But in 1362 Bonaventura died in childbirth.

This was a dramatic moment in Catherine's life. Her sister's death gave her a sense of loss, then inconsolable. Bonaventura was the only person who had understood her, in whom she could confide, and with whom she found herself in sympathy. What was she to do now? In such cases, amid uncertainties and suffering, grief is overwhelming, and the mourner feels abandoned in the

void. Outer life has lost its meaning; worse still, the inner life is clouded over. Reasoning is rendered helpless by a sort of spiritual paralysis. Where, or to whom, was Catherine to turn? Silence and solitude within her and without. But in solitude and silence Catherine had found Jesus in her childhood. Why should she not find Him again? She was now fifteen and could raise herself to God with more fervour, and experience Christ again. Her biographers do not tell us whether the vision of Vallepiazza now returned to her mind.

Gradually her grief for her beloved dead sister turned to remorse. She felt guilty of having prayed less, of having drawn away from God, desiring the good things of this world and consenting to enjoy some worldly pleasures. She *was* guilty. Her sister was good, affectionate, kind, lovable, but she, Catherine, had loved her more than Christ, and this was not right. She had preferred the teachings of Bonaventura to those of God, and her guilt was therefore great. She needed to weep, to pray, to see clearly in her own mind, to resolve these painful doubts. The 'Miracoli' say it was now that she asked her mother's leave to confess to Fra Tommaso della Fonte, and this is psychologically possible. Tommaso della Fonte became a connection of Catherine's family when their daughter Niccoluccia married Palmerio di Nese delle Fonti. Born about 1337, he became an orphan during the 1348 plague, was brought up in Giacomo Benincasa's family and considered by them as one of themselves. He chose the religious life and in 1357 or 1358 was accepted as a Dominican novice, and later became a priest. He had therefore been familiar to the household of Giacomo di Benincasa since his youth, and on an occasion as sad as this of Bonaventura's death he must have done all he could to console his dear friends. Catherine, inconsolable and prostrate with grief, wished perhaps to open her heart to this friar who, besides being one of the family, was also devout and might understand; and 'the friar strengthened her much in her scorn of the world and her resolve to draw nearer to God', and to make his advice more effective, did not hesitate to point the moral lesson of Bonaventura, who had died because she was vain and had drawn her sister away from her devotion to God. Perhaps Catherine immediately applied to herself the idea of vanity, death, and chastisement, for 'when the friar departed she remained

lost in thought'. In this state of mind the idea of guilt, already strong in her, may have taken possession of her conscience and made her feel a great sinner, while her imagination led her to liken herself to Mary Magdalen, seen in the paintings in church, prostrate at the feet of Christ, weeping and imploring.

Her family guessed nothing of this intimate drama. Her father, a good hard-working man of scrupulous piety, had no interest in searching the hearts of others, or talent for so doing. Her mother was still hoping for her daughter's marriage, to console her for the loss of Bonaventura. Moreover, in that household they needed a son-in-law with a certain position in view, both for the sake of the dyeing business, which was faltering uncertainly and for the sake of Catherine herself, who was good, intelligent, wise and devout, and could not be given just any man for a husband. Busied with such thoughts they could not be expected to bother about Catherine's feelings, and in any case, thanks to Bonaventura's help, the maiden had yielded to her family's wishes and was behaving well, painting and adorning herself—according to Lapa, well on the way towards marriage. At last they found the future son-in-law they had looked for so persistently and circumspectly; he was just what they wanted and the whole family rejoiced. Catherine would form a model family and be the joy of her parents. At once Lapa began to urge her daughter to consent to the marriage, but this time also the girl resisted her mother, not passively as before but openly and decisively, referring to her own religious vocation. Neither her mother's insistence nor the intervention of her father, brothers and sisters was of the slightest use. Catherine was determined not to marry, and would not budge from her resolve.

They then appealed to her confessor, the good family friend Fra Tommaso della Fonte. He accepted the delicate mission and spoke to his new penitent as a family friend, and as a priest in the confessional, trying to sound the depths of her soul.

By means of objections and rebukes he tried to test the genuineness of Catherine's vocation, but after several interrogations and conversations he could only, in conscience, give her this advice: 'Go and cut off your hair'—excellent advice which the girl hesitated to put into practice. She thought of her mother's grief and astonishment at seeing her shorn of her shining braids, but at

the same time she believed that, once her hair had been cut off, her mother would cease tormenting her about marriage. 'So, after debating inwardly for some days, at last one day with all the strength of her soul she took the scissors and cut off all her locks, and arrayed her head as best she might, so that her mother would not notice anything.' But although she stayed apart from her family as much as she could and tried to avoid Lapa, her mother noticed that Catherine, contrary to her custom, always kept her head covered; she asked her the reason and her daughter, murmuring something incomprehensible, went up to her and uncovered her head. At the astonished Lapa's cries of rage and imprecations the whole household ran to see what had happened. There was a great commotion; everyone was furious with the rebellious daughter, who under cover of the general confusion fled to her accustomed retreat.

Did anyone ever hear of such a thing as a simple girl setting herself against her parents' and brothers' will? Not Paternosters but a husband was what she needed. And there the husband was, only waiting for the day when he would meet Catherine and speak to her, while she chose this moment to cut off her hair at the roots, thus robbing herself of one of woman's finest adornments—almost dishonouring herself and bringing shame upon her family. Lapa, beside herself with these angry thoughts, shouted at her: 'Wretched girl, do you think to evade our purpose by cutting off your hair? It will grow again and in spite of you, and you shall take a husband even if your heart breaks.'

Lapa imposed her will on the whole family; all were to treat Catherine harshly until she understood that because of her the honour of Giacomo di Benincasa's family was at stake, and she must yield—by force if not for love. A family council was held and decreed that in the future Catherine should no longer have a room of her own for prayer and meditation, and should wait upon them all. Her family did not understand that the maiden might have been won over with gentleness and tact, but never with rebukes, insults, mockery. Their opposition stiffened her resolve and their insults drove her with greater ardour to her faith. Mockery aroused her energy to resist while her imagination became more fervent when she was humiliated. She decided that every member of her family represented a character of the heaven-

ly court: her father was Christ, her mother the Blessed Virgin, her brothers, sisters and other kin Saints or disciples. What suffering may not be borne for Christ and His disciples, for the Virgin and the Saints? So she endured the mockery without resentment and in her heart replied to insults with prayer. Scorned on earth, she felt exalted in heaven. But although her resistance was often strong she yet had disconsolate moments when she feared her own weakness, and then with desperate urgency she begged Christ to make her purpose inflexible.

She did her cooking cheerfully, thinking of the sufferings of Christ, and served calmly and attentively at table. If her parents and brothers wounded her deeply with their biting sarcasm and jests, she turned to Our Lady and the Saints for strength to endure. As she was not allowed a room of her own to pray in, she took refuge in the room of her brother Stefano, which was free all day, where once she was discovered by her father, kneeling in a corner earnestly at prayer.

Catherine struggled on gallantly but she feared for the future. How was she to escape the incessant family persecution, how dedicate herself entirely and exclusively to the religious life? She remembered Euphrosyne and her own desire to become a Dominican. What had been the pleasing fancy of a child became now a serious consideration.

Her thoughts were so concentrated on this and her desire so intense that in a dream she saw a 'certain place outside this world, where a multitude of folk were doing all kinds of different work, and engaged in a confusion of diverse trades, the purpose and nature of which she could not understand. She wanted to pass through the midst of these folk but she did not dare. As she stood there timid and frightened she heard a voice saying: "If you want to pass through the midst of all these folk you must hide under something white". And raising her eyes towards that voice she saw St Dominic just as she had seen him painted in the church, and he said to her: "Come and receive my habit". And as she went towards him she saw coming after her two dishonest women, very beautiful and richly attired, who looked like sisters, and they caught her from behind by her clothes, holding her and pulling her back with all their strength. She turned on them and beat them and at last forced them to let her go, and escaped out of

their hands. And passing on alone she saw that those people had taken the two sisters—but she passed on safe and sound.’

A psychologist, analysing this dream, would find in it all the elements of Catherine’s state of mind at that time—the perplexity and broken reflection of her thoughts, and the kernel of her life’s desire. There are her own kin who oppose her way of life, that is, the busy multitude, undefined and incomprehensible, that frightens her; there is her confessor in whom she confides, who advises and helps her, that is, the ‘white thing’, the Dominican robe. We find St Dominic, the central inspiration of the dream, who calls her to himself and orders her to become a Dominican—which corresponds to the realisation of her longing desire, and to her habitual vision of the figure of the painted Saint. The two richly dressed sisters, beautiful and voluptuous, who seize her by her clothes—notice ‘by her clothes’, not by her body—are Worldliness and Human Beauty that had in the past attracted her soul, wanting to possess it, but that Catherine had striven against and beaten off. Once free from these two sisters she saw that the multitude came to her aid, and the people seized Worldliness and Human Beauty. This referred to her own family, who would help her to win the victory once they understood that she was right.

But Catherine did not make such an analysis. When she awoke two things must have impressed her most: the apparition of St Dominic and her own escape from the struggle ‘safe and sound’. She understood her own future and rejoiced. Just as the vision of Vallepiazza had inspired her childhood and as Bonaventura’s death had revealed to her the sense of sin in all its profundity, so, at this decisive moment, she knew in her heart what she must be. She felt strong again; no more doubts or hesitations: St Dominic wanted her as a daughter. She made light of obstacles, opposition, struggles, firmly believing that she would get the better of them. Until then timid with her parents, she now became courageous; her prudence became audacity. She demanded a family council and before her entire family she spoke openly of the vow of virginity she had made to Christ, of her desire to live with God and for God, and not at all for the world and with the world. Her words were eloquent because of her conviction and she made a sure stand because her spirit was full of the warning and revelation of her great dream. ‘Do you want me to be your servant?

I will willingly do so provided you will leave me a little time for myself alone. Do you want to drive me away from home? Very well, I will go—and the Lord will take care of me. Will you let me live freely with you? I do not want to cost you anything. You need give me nothing but bread and water, but leave me free to live as I please.'

This was Catherine's second success with her family, and not just a passing surprise like the earlier one. This time she convinced them, and got her own way. Her family could make no objections, and had no arguments to bring forward. If she did not want to marry she had the right to refuse.

Raimondo da Capua describes the family conclave as dramatic and moving, ending with a general flow of tears. We prefer to believe the version in the 'Miracoli', that they all understood her desire and 'decided to leave her alone'. Most probably her father was the first to understand his daughter's mind. He was a devout man, he had been astonished to find her in Stefano's room praying so earnestly, he had seen her fervour on other occasions, and admired her humility in her menial tasks. When he heard her now, so calmly and clearly defending herself and speaking of her vow, which she evidently intended to keep, his heart was softened and he had to admit that his daughter had a superior nature, or, at least, was different from other girls. Therefore he turned to her approvingly, entrusted her to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and asked for her prayers, ordering the family to cease all persecution and not to venture in any way to oppose her spiritual activity. 'Have we lost a valuable son-in-law here below? We shall acquire a better one in God.' The most delicate point of the whole question was thus resolved, and the father's authority, affirming his own confidence, could not be withstood.

Catherine rejoiced, not at her victory but at her liberty won. She asked for a room for herself and got it—at last a cell of her own! Already, during her persecution, she had tried to construct a spiritual cell in her soul, as a refuge in the darkest or most painful moments. But to be able to shut oneself up within four walls, to think and contemplate at will, is much more. In our cell our time is our own. A vision does not suffer interruptions, colloquy with the divine flows without check. If we succeed in animating our cell we are peerlessly rich, and we are miracle

workers when we can create a new and loving atmosphere within the four walls between the ceiling and the floor. Seclusion means infinite expansion of the powers of the soul, the escape from self and from everyday life. It is miraculous for the Saint, a paradise for the ascetic. But to seclude oneself is a hard business. We must acquire that absolute control over our being of which the great majority of men seem incapable. The elimination of the superficial ego, to set free the ego that needs only itself, is a task requiring the greatest heroism. And all this must be accomplished without impairing the sense of humanity, of superior beauty, of sacrifice. The soul that finds expansion and sublimity in the cloistered cell is no less great than the soul that expands and soars in the forest, under the broad sky, or among the fields or mountains or God's creatures. A wonderful light illumines the man who loves nature in God, but a no less enchanting radiance pervades the dark cell of the solitary who passionately calls upon the divine. It is the 'shining dark' of the mystics of all places and all times.

Catherine wanted her cell to be a sanctuary full of divine inspiration, where she could kindle herself at the sacred flame. Since her first contacts with the Preaching Friars she had begun to practise a methodical and progressive asceticism, which now she intensified and perfected.

She was not tortured by the formidable sensuality of Suso, to subdue which, until forty years of age, he continually thought out fresh instruments of self-torture; but she knew that the flesh is weak even if the spirit is willing, and so this solitary maiden of Fontebranda set out to eliminate all influence of her body over her soul. She did not go to extremes. We do not find in her that harsh and gloomy poetry that the tortured piety of Suso inspires, nor even the religious anguish that the brilliant but hard and extravagant imagination of Grünewald expressed in his paintings.

Catherine, scourging herself so as to draw blood, training herself to eat almost nothing and to sleep very little at night, and on a hard bench, does not make us shudder. This daughter of the people is aristocratic in her restraint, even when chastising her own body.

But still her mother could not understand her. At the bottom of her heart had remained a grudge for having failed to bend her to her own will, and she grieved over the loss of such a fine opportunity for marriage. A woman was made to marry and

bear children—the rest was nonsense. Religion was necessary, but when one went to church and heard Mass and said one's morning and night prayers and made the sign of the Cross when meeting an ugly figure along the road or during a storm or on seeing an accident—that was enough. Anything else was bad for the health, and what use could it be? When she saw her daughter pining away, perhaps she listened at the keyhole of her cell, and hearing her scourge herself with an iron chain she could control herself no longer, calling out: 'My daughter, my daughter, I see you already as one dead, alas! Do you want at all costs to kill yourself? Woe is me! Who has bereft me of my daughter? Who has brought this grief upon me?' She bewailed so much, scratching herself with her nails and tearing the hair from her head, according to Raimondo da Capua, that the neighbours rushed in and the whole house was in uproar. But Catherine went on with her mortifications and prayers.

Lapa thought one must at least sleep well at night, and not ruin one's health, so one evening she entered Catherine's cell like a Fury and pestered her so much that the poor girl, to avoid something worse, consented to sleep with her mother, but as soon as Lapa was asleep she slipped out of bed and went to her room to weep and do penance. After some nights Lapa noticed her daughter's absence and renewed her reproaches and scoldings which Catherine avoided for the next few nights by sleeping in her mother's bed, first placing some pieces of wood under the sheet. The trick was discovered, and Lapa, convinced that there was nothing more she could do with her daughter, let her sleep in her cell again.

Catherine may have hoped to be left in peace to purify and refine her spiritual life without further hindrance. Her dream of St Dominic was ever in her mind, and the promise received filled her with joy, but she was in a hurry for its fulfilment. If she had been a pure contemplative she would have waited for events to concur to make her a Dominican, but it was not in her nature merely to wait, hope and contemplate; she was practical and interpreted her vision in a practical way. What did it mean, to receive the Dominican habit?

Many times in the Dominican church she must have seen the Tertiaries entering the Cappella delle Volte for their services, and

longed to be one with them; now in 'the room assigned to her in the upper part of the house' she identified this promise with the Third Order of St Dominic, and the 'Come and receive my habit' meant she should try to be a Sister of Penitence. In this way, perhaps following a suggestion of her confessor, she personally interpreted the dream, and desired its fulfilment. But it was not easy to become one of those ladies, some of whom belonged to great Sienese families, who did so much good for Christ's sake. The promise of her dream made it quite clear that she would be a Tertiary one day, but it would take time, so she began at once to consider what requests, entreaties, recommendations might help.

Lapa continued most anxiously to watch over her young daughter, whose health declined every day. She decided to take her to the hot springs at Vignone, not far from Siena, to recuperate her strength. The cure was for the stomach, liver and nerves—just what Catherine needed. Once she had recovered her health she would surely lessen her penances, and might even give them up altogether and be like any other girl. Her daughter's odd ways, although of a religious nature, were Lapa's obsession, but she still hoped to get the better of them. She was almost as obstinate in her plans as Catherine. The girl obediently accompanied her mother.

Then, as now, the summer bathing resorts were centres of amusements and pastimes. 'The elegant society of Siena and the countryside, with wealthy folk and prelates from beyond the City State, met at the baths of Petriolo, Macereto, Vignone, Rapolano and Ofano. From all around, on horseback, on foot, in litters and coaches, in carts drawn by buffaloes, with children "in salmis sive cistis", people flocked to the various baths, to where they might enjoy the greatest liberty, together with the benefits of the water. The nobles and their ladies brought with them a great train of squires and pages and pack-wagons; the rich brought their servants; all went as best they could, but none with weapons of offence or defence.' For some weeks a brilliant gathering of idle, thoughtless, gay folk met together. Most of them wanted to forget the fights, the tedium, the monotony of their own castles, villages and towns, and find refreshment in the brilliant company. The ladies displayed their silk robes, gleaming jewels, elaborate headdress, and elegant carriages; the men rode or walked, escorted

the ladies to the balls, banquets and receptions where all met every day. There was plenty to eat and drink. Conventional restrictions were laid aside and even the ecclesiastics abandoned their habitual reserve in the gay and festive society. The cure of the waters served as an excuse to live in an exciting and sensual atmosphere, and pass the time more happily than usual among new and varied acquaintances.

We do not know what Catherine thought about Vignone when she arrived, nor her impressions of the life of the place. The old biographers showed no interest in this and passed it over. But Giacomo Benincasa's daughter must have noticed at once how much freer were morals there than in the city, and when this shocked her deeply she withdrew into herself still more and intensified her harsh mortifications. The 'Leggenda Minore' reports that it was noticed that 'all the time while returning from the baths she never lifted her eyes, as if she were absent from her body, with her mind raised to God'. Probably she did so to escape the general merry-making, and to keep herself quite apart from the worldly gaiety that surrounded her. By contrast, her thoughts at Vignone were always with the souls in purgatory or hell, and amidst such enjoyment she felt herself the worst of sinners, worthy of the pains of the damned or of the souls in purgatorial fire.

The bathing took place in a common 'piscina'. At Vignone the Commune of Siena had had a wall built in the middle of the bath to separate the men from the women, but there were no single cabins. Catherine, seeing the jets of boiling water, thought of going under them and so 'afflicting her body in a new way, even in the midst of enjoyment'. Raimondo da Capua himself, in reporting this, emphasises this contrast which reveals the maiden's state of mind and her search for intense suffering to counter-balance opposing forces. It was difficult to put her plan into execution as she took her bath with all the other women and under Lapa's watchful eye. She wanted to bathe alone, and obtained her mother's permission to enter the water when all the others had left the baths. She did so, and, going under the jets, scorched her flesh with the sulphurous water, rejoicing in suffering for her sins, and praying God that this suffering might be considered her purgatory.

These baths were a great disappointment for Lapa. On returning with her daughter to Siena she gave up hope of bringing her round to her own will and could only vent her ill-humour with grumbles and complaints. Catherine, instead, had won a victory over her own body, by which she felt better prepared to be a Dominican Tertiary. All her energies were now concentrated, her will inflexible. She must be a Tertiary, or God would punish her.

The Order of Penitence of St Dominic was about a century old. Associated with the first Dominicans of the thirteenth century we find lay folk living in confraternities, but without fixed and general Orders. Without official recognition, they were men and women gathered together under the guidance of the Preachers and following their leadership but bound to them only morally. To make this bond closer and their activity more efficacious, and to avoid the danger of heresy which was making many proselytes among the laity, in 1285 the General of the Dominicans, Muñoz da Zamora, drew up a Rule, thus giving a juridical and permanent character to the Third Order of St Dominic.

The Preachers were the most learned Order of the Middle Ages and the hammer of the heretics. In the thirteenth century they had preached a new and revolutionary philosophy with a sound kernel of Catholic dogma; in the fourteenth century they had modified the narrow Aristotelianism, accepting various current interpretations; but even with this greater freedom and variety of interpretation Thomism remained the foundation of their thought. The Pope made use of the Preachers for the defence of the Church, and they were admired for their attachment to ecclesiastical institutions and their zeal for souls. They were the great Inquisitors, whose appearance sometimes struck fear, but whose faith was never questioned. The investigations, examinations, judgments and verdicts that they conducted or delivered were generally believed and approved in official circles. Heterodoxy, let alone heresy, was inconceivable with the Preachers. A lay Order could therefore flourish under their protection and direction, even when the Third Order aroused the Papal diffidence and apprehension, and 'begardism' and 'beghinism' were somewhat suspect.

The whole Dominican Order made itself guarantor for its

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own Tertiaries. Before being received the postulant had to be diligently examined, to see whether 'she be of honest life and good fame, and in no way suspect of heresy or error; but instead, as a true daughter in Christ of Messer St Dominic, a zealous follower of the Catholic faith, according to her knowledge and power'. And the Order's supervision of its Tertiaries was so careful that more than forty years after the institution of its Third Order, Pope John XXII, in the 'Clementine' Bull which condemned the 'beghine' because almost everywhere they had fallen into disobedience, error or heresy, nevertheless commended the Dominican 'beghine' of Lombardy and Tuscany because, living virtuously, they devoutly attended the churches, obeyed their superiors, refrained from erroneous opinions or dangerous discussions, and, in family life or in the 'beghinaggi', observed the rules of chastity and holy stern simplicity. 'They have lived until now, and they still live in such a praiseworthy manner that no suspicion has ever arisen, or arises, about them.' So the Third Order flourished, well defined by the Rule and kept within its prescribed limits by the Preachers. If the Dominicans did not feel the need of asking the Popes for an approval of their own Tertiaries like that granted by Nicholas IV to the Order of Penitence of St Francis, it was because this faith and vitality had been preserved intact. A prosperous activity has no need of special recognitions; if living it thrives by its own strength. When, at the beginning of the fifteenth century, through the assiduous labours of Fra Tommaso da Siena, every effort was made to obtain an official approval of the Dominican Third Order, it was a sign that its own interior energy had declined, and that, while boasting of its past glories, it felt the need of exterior supports.

Already in the first years of the fourteenth century, according to Laurent, we find groups of Dominican Sisters of Penitence, living either alone or in communities in Florence, Lucca, Arezzo, San Gimignano and Siena. They were Tertiaries, dedicated to prayer and works of mercy, who received no special mention, but did good within their possibilities. They were humble but aspired to heavenly things; without any remarkable spiritual gifts, but devout. Many of them had mediocre minds and souls that could not soar aloft, but they understood the extent of human misery and how much men need justice and love. Pope John XXII's

statement meant that the Dominican 'beghine' of Tuscany had no intellectual curiosities and felt no special need to analyse and explain to themselves the foundation of their faith, or to discuss arduous dogmatic problems. They were, for the most part, simple pious souls who were glad to have a limited but definite task to perform, and rejoiced to work for the good of others, by the side of the Preachers. They were in this way proud of their communities and observant of their rules. They always wore the Dominican habit and, like the other Tertiaries who wore an ample cloak or 'mantello', they were called 'mantellate'. At Siena they met every first Friday in the month. They met in the Cappella delle Volte of San Domenico in Camporegio to attend Mass, hear their Rule read and explained, and be exhorted by their spiritual director, or admonished and reproved if there had been any transgression of the Rule, of the Commandments of God and of the Church. Their social activity was serving in the hospitals, visiting the prisons, consoling the afflicted, mourning with the disconsolate, and interceding for sinners and those who had been led astray.

The work of the Mantellate (or 'pinzochere' or 'beghine'), or Tertiary Sisters of St Dominic, was Catherine's ideal. Once she belonged officially to the Order she would be free to hear the learned conversations of the Preachers, and at least in part satisfy her longing to know her faith more deeply. Some time had elapsed, and various difficulties and obstacles had been overcome, since her dream of St Dominic; now she could brook no further delay. Once she had taken the habit of a Tertiary her good but obstinate mother would surely stop tormenting her with grumblings and recriminations; moreover, in her dream she had received a command, which it might be dangerous to ignore. Her longing strengthened her resolve. She appealed to her mother to help her in begging the Mantellate to receive her. Lapa, who had at last realised her daughter's determined character, reluctantly consented. We do not know what she told the Sisters, but, knowing her expansive, emotional and talkative nature, we incline to believe that she drew a somewhat dramatic portrait of her daughter, so much so that the Tertiaries chose not to meddle in the matter and put forward the pretext that they accepted only widows of a certain age and of good reputation.

We do not know why Catherine's confessor, Fra Tommaso della Fonte, did not support his penitent's request. Knowing her desire he was surely the most suitable person to further it successfully. Perhaps he did not wish to support a cause unpopular with her family, to whom he owed a debt of gratitude, or perhaps he failed to understand his penitent's mind, taking her for an 'exaltée' who must be led back to normal life. This latter hypothesis may find confirmation in the words that Raimondo da Capua uses with reference to the 'very indiscreet directors' of the future saint, 'who did not understand her at all and blindly wanted to lead her along the ordinary road of ordinary maidens'.

The Tertiaries' negative reply did not discourage Catherine, for her faith in her supernatural dream made her confident of reaching her goal. Meanwhile, however, she fell ill with chickenpox. Not a grave illness, but her face, hands, skin were covered with pustules. Catherine feared it might be divine chastisement, and her fever rose. Lapa was terribly worried. It was an illness common to children, but Catherine was nearly eighteen years old, and for an adult it might be fatal. She was afraid, moreover, that a body so weakened with fasting and penance might not hold out against the high fever. In great agitation she sat by the sick girl's bedside, became her devoted nurse, tried to find comforting words. Catherine was not worried about the chickenpox itself—what did that matter to her?—but about her unfulfilled desire. She must have smiled with gentle pity at seeing Lapa always there, so distressed because her face was unrecognisable and her life in danger. Her mother could not grasp the spiritual reasons for her illness, but she herself, always remembering most vividly her dream of St Dominic, knew that it was a punishment for not having yet answered the call, or at least it was a warning to answer it as soon as possible. She used her illness to touch her mother's heart. 'Dearest mother, if you want me to recover and be well, help me to fulfil my desire to receive the habit of the Sisters of Penitence of St Dominic—else I am much afraid that God and St Dominic, who call me to their holy service, will see to it that you have me no longer, either in this or the other dress.' And she repeated many times her gloomy prediction that she would die if she did not become a Tertiary. Lapa was frightened. All she could do now was to try to further the fulfilment of her

daughter's desire. She went back to 'the College of those venerable women who call themselves Mantellate of St Dominic, of whom there are a great number in Siena, and told them of her daughter's insistent and fervent petition'. The fear of losing Catherine for ever now gave Lapa eloquence; she could guarantee that her daughter's vocation was certain; it was willed by Heaven; and she argued and pleaded so much that the Tertiaries promised to take her daughter's case into consideration, and to visit the postulant themselves so as to ascertain her physical and spiritual condition. The visit took place; the Dominican Sisters observed, enquired, learnt; the impressions they received were edifying and were communicated to their fellow Sisters and to the Dominican Friars 'so that they gave the College such a report of her that all with one accord, as if inspired by God, willingly accepted her in their Congregation'. Catherine heard with joy that at last she would be received as a Dominican Tertiary. But meanwhile she did not know how long her illness might last. In her perplexity and impatience she prayed to God with extraordinary vehemence to heal her, so that she might go before the altar in San Domenico to receive the longed-for habit.

The illness ran its course, and at the end of 1364 or the beginning of 1365 Catherine, still perhaps convalescent, went to the Cappella delle Volte for her clothing. There were present the Prioress with the Sisters of Penitence, the Master of the Tertiaries and the family of Giacomo Benincasa. The rite was that established by the third article of the Rule. The postulant kneels at the altar before the Master, and when he asks her what she desires replies: 'God's mercy and yours'. The acceptance follows; then the Master blesses the robe which the aspirant puts on 'apart'; she returns to the altar and the 'Veni Creator Spiritus' is intoned; after some prayers of thankfulness and praise the postulant is sprinkled with holy water and is received with the kiss of peace by all her fellow Sisters.

It is easy to imagine Catherine's joy and enthusiasm at the fulfilment of her dream, and at finding herself welcomed among the numerous family of the Mantellate. She rejoiced also at having a new director, the Master of the Tertiaries, to whom she might open her heart, of whom she might beg explanations of obscure

points in the Gospel, and whom she might hear speaking of God and religion.

Joergensen and Padre Taurisano believe this Master was the gentle and conscientious Bartolomeo Montucci, no great scholar, but loyal to his apostolic duty and a lover of the writings of St Bernard. We cannot be sure of this, but in any case the bonds between Catherine and the Preachers became more intimate, so that gradually she came to consider the Dominicans as her brothers and felt bound to them in a spiritual fraternity.

After her clothing she went joyously back home and into her cell, which she intended for some time to come never to leave except to go to church. She was to complete a year's novitiate, under the guidance and supervision of the Friars and Sisters. She wished to observe the Rule scrupulously—indeed, to surpass it in severity. No one now would weary her with worldly conversation; she could henceforth pray, meditate, implore all day and all night; she was free to stay as long as she liked in the company of God. She must have felt an overwhelming joy at being mistress of her own time, after overcoming such grave difficulties, and at being able to dedicate herself to the life of the spirit and the progressive realisation of ever loftier ideals.

In solitude the most varied thoughts flock to us and our memories become more distinct. By the side of future purposes arise images of the past, and even far-off events of our life pass before our mind in clear and decided colours. Both present and future—we see them side by side, now overlapping, now mingling, now emerging each in its own luminous clarity, and then fading away. Our hearts beat more quickly, and we feel a vague sweetness and an indefinable longing. Although we have reached a longed-for goal we are not satisfied: something is still lacking. There is an emptiness we wish to fill, we do not know how or why. All our thoughts are wistful and melancholy. Then there comes once more a dance of lights and shades, joys and sorrows. Far-away memories we thought were buried return to life, and wring our hearts. Have we chosen wisely, or ill? Are we really on the road God wishes us to tread? Words that relations, friends, even strangers have said to us at the most diverse moments, sound again insistently in our mind and seem to condemn our life and our works.

That Catherine passed through a similar state of mind after the immense joy of becoming a Mantellata seems suggested by her vision of the silken robes. Her sister Bonaventura with her worldly counsel, her sudden death, the advice given by Tommaso della Fonte, her own admiration and occasional desire for beautiful stuffs and elegant dresses, her mother's incitements to marriage, her childhood and girlhood—all this must have passed swiftly through her mind. But this was the past and she must break away from it; in the present there could only be Christ. Fragments of her old nature yet persisted, and tormented her. She prayed before the crucifix and strove with herself. The past must die, and still it lived. Her nature must be subdued, but it rose again. It was a drama of the soul. As she strove with herself there appeared to her a magnificent silken dress, offered her by a devil, possibly young, possibly very alluring. Catherine made the sign of the Cross and the vision disappeared, but the longing to have that beautiful dress remained in her soul, and with it was associated the idea of being a bride. Yes, a bride: human nature had re-asserted itself. But she had already given herself to Christ, she was His alone. She turned to Him imploringly: 'O my sweet bridegroom, I have never desired any other bridegroom but Thee, help me to overcome these temptations in Thy name; I do not beseech Thee to remove them from me, but mercifully to grant me strength to overcome them.' The prayer calmed her; her thoughts became luminous and a majestic vision enchanted her; the Blessed Virgin appeared to her, and drew from the side of the crucified Christ, to whom Catherine had turned with such hope during her struggle, a dress more wondrously beautiful than the other, covered with gold and jewels and shining like a heavenly thing. The Virgin robed her in it. What more could she desire?

According to her biographers she remained in her cell for three years, going out only to Mass and to the services in San Domenico, and speaking with no one except her confessor. Perhaps the biographers exaggerate, but certainly during these three years she passed hours that were delightful, joyous and peaceful mingled with others that were dark and stormy, even sometimes desperate and tragic. Meanwhile she acquired a knowledge of her gifts and of her mission, deepened her soul, fixed the main lines of her thought, strengthened her will, developed her intuition

and second-sightedness and soared above herself. Her activity later on, even if apparently new and diverse, had its psychological or religious foundation in this time of solitude and silence; a preparation that was difficult and fiercely contested, but which revealed to her the substance of her future masterpiece, 'The Book of Divine Doctrine', and taught her to fight to the end for God and the Church. Her own unyielding character was formed during these years, she meditated on the human soul during her ascetic practices, and in subduing her own nature she had a foretaste of the power of God. Her spiritual strength was more evident now than when, later on, she was to dominate princes and peoples, dignitaries of the Church and Popes, and her conquests of virtues at this time more admirable than her later conquests of souls—disciples, followers, admirers. Raimondo da Capua tells us that in these years she 'found the desert within her own house and solitude in the midst of people', but it is truer to say that in the desert of her cell she found the Holy Spirit, and in solitude the secret of self-mastery.

Her solitude and silence were often transformed into joyful companionship, passionate colloquies or bitterly fought duels. At moments a vast and mighty radiance surrounded her, she was enraptured with cosmic harmonies. At other times she was terrified at the sight of dreadful abysses, or saw herself standing like a column in a spiritual temple that threatened to fall. In her cell were solitude and silence, but within her worked Christ, that is, the fullness of life. When Catherine felt the attacks of the devil desirous to possess her, her solitude became inflamed with the ardour of battle because she was determined to win, at all costs—and it was full of the splendour of Paradise when she felt herself sustained by the master of her spirit, Jesus. She felt intensely the dualism of soul and body, and longed for an association that would mean a real unity. The body is heavy, loves material things and obstructs the liberty of the spirit which is light, aspires to the heights, longs for purity, is made for union with God. How can they be separated, so closely linked as they are? And where is the point of release to be found? All the saints sought for this, and found it in the suppression of the body. 'Mortify your earthly members', St Paul lays down as a law. Since her childhood Catherine had practised asceticism, through imitation, or on the

advice of the Church, or because of her own natural bent. She had achieved good results, but now she went deeper into the meaning of asceticism and perfected her technique. She discovered that mortification leads to the discovery of our real being, and frees the infinite spirit from the bonds in which the body seeks to hold it. Realising that mortification was necessary, the newly accepted Mantellata reduced her food to a handful of raw herbs, almost denied herself sleep, ploughed her flesh with scourgings and tortured it with a hair shirt, mortifying the body so that the spirit might grow free and great, suppressing it to subdue the perverse will. The mortification and suppression were not an end in themselves. 'Works of penance and other corporal exercises shall be set as a means, and not as a chief end', she said later on in the 'Dialogue', but it was at this time that she experienced and formulated this truth. She was far from rejoicing in mortification for its own sake. Her thought was fixed in Christ who had already appeared to her in Vallepiatta; she thought of Him and loved Him so intensely, she invoked Him so often with tears, that she saw Him, felt Him near her, heard His voice; Christ was present to her 'whether she prayed, or meditated, read, watched, or slept'. He protected her and was her guide. But the dreams, the sensible or intellectual apparitions, began to follow each other in great number; some were gentle, with reflections of the divine, uplifting her soul; others were dark; some were attractive and repulsive at the same time. Which was she to trust? Devils may appear in the guise of angels—St Paul had taught her this; how could she be sure of the holiness and truth of these apparitions?

Her spiritual directors must have spoken to her of divine and diabolic visions, and told her how to distinguish them. But she did not always remember the sources of her thought and everything seemed to her to spring up in her soul through the direct inspiration of Christ. Now also, God answered her doubt: 'My vision begins with terror, but then becomes sweet; the bitterness gives way to sweetness. The contrary is true of the fiend's vision, because of its origin. At first it gives a certain pleasure; it seems true, it is attractive, but later on it causes bitterness and tears.' A traditional but unconvincing and unsatisfying answer. Catherine also felt this; in fact she was taught another criterion for distinguishing: 'But I will give you an even more certain and infall-

ible sign. Be sure of this, that as I am the Truth My visions must give the soul a greater knowledge of the Truth, a knowledge of the Truth about Me and about herself, which is indispensable to the Soul—that is, the soul must know Me and herself; through such knowledge the soul must come to despise herself and honour Me, and this is really the work of Humility. Through my visions, then, the soul must become more humble; she must see herself as nothing, and despise herself. The contrary occurs with visions of the fiend. . . . Examining yourself therefore diligently, you will be able to know whence proceeds the vision, from Truth or from falsehood, because Truth makes the soul humble while falsehood makes her proud.’ Two hundred years later St Teresa was to say the same thing. This is the traditional teaching of the Church.

It is necessary for the ascetic to distinguish good inspirations and visions from evil ones, but when he suffers from apparitions which seem to do violence to his whole being, and hurl him into darkest hell, where his soul feels torn to pieces, although it is easy for him to distinguish the source he is none the less stricken with horror. After sublime visions Catherine also experienced such apparitions from the underworld and apparently was so terror-stricken as to be frightened of their re-occurrence. Strong-willed and valiant as she was, she doubted her powers of resistance and appealed to God ‘insistently for many days’, to give her strength to bear them. She heard the answer in her soul: ‘My daughter, accept for love of Me the sweet for the bitter, and the bitter for the sweet; and then have no fear, for you will certainly be strong in all things’. She received the teaching with joy, and folded the promise to her heart, and from then on rejoiced at every tribulation.

Until now Catherine’s sensual temptations had not been very evident. There was only a slight hint of sensuality in the vision of the silk dress. She was not subject to those powerful impulses of the blood that set the whole organism awry, nor to those implacable desires of the flesh crying out to be satisfied. She certainly knew about the generation of men and animals, from her mother’s and sister’s instructions, or through her own observance of nature, or the reading of the sacred scriptures. But these were thoughts or observations that had neither led her astray from her strict conception of life nor insidiously entered her mind to arouse morbid

curiosity. Her constant purpose to be the bride of Christ made her avoid not only men, but even the thought of men. But this spiritual and moral integrity had not prevented words, observations, thoughts and sensual stories from entering her consciousness and remaining there harmlessly for many years—always ready to show themselves if this consciousness were explored or disturbed. In fact, one of the merits of asceticism consists in causing hidden desires to rise to the surface, and in rousing the passions in all their strength, so as to be able to recognise and subdue them. Catherine, who sounded the depths of her own soul, and examined herself every day to arrive at self-knowledge, aroused those sensual thoughts that had lain hidden in some fold of her being. Once aroused they seize hold of the imagination, try to possess the soul and become powerful. With Catherine sensuality was at first very subtle, hardly noticeable. An affectionate word or term of love overheard, the glimpse of a kiss given or received, a love song, the radiant face of a bride-to-be, or even a vaguely licentious conversation—to which there and then, many years before, she had paid no attention—these must all have meant at first merely a fleeting thought. But this thought came back, and gradually grew more insistent, and took on consistency. It drew attention to itself, worked slowly but continuously in the imagination, became importunate; banished, it returned in brighter hues and a more winning and insinuating form. Catherine was perturbed. Even her dreams contained sensual images, and worse still, she had genuinely and completely erotic visions. Believing her body to be the cause of these, she scourged it pitilessly and watched and prayed without rest. She did not want even the smallest particle of her being to be contaminated, and so she felt horror, pain and indignation.

According to Raimondo da Capua, the devils assumed aerial bodies and were very numerous. They represented amorous themes of every kind, and every now and then, turning to the maiden, they said pityingly and with a sort of good-humoured irony: 'Poor little thing, why do you torture yourself so much and for nothing? What use is all your suffering and grief? Do you think you will be able to go on wasting your body in this way? If you do, you will kill yourself, and it will be your fault. Leave such foolishness alone, if you don't want to die. You are at an age for

enjoyment; you are young, and can soon recover your health and strength. Live like other women, take a husband, bear children for the increase of mankind. You wish to please God? Didn't the holy women take husbands? Think of Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, Rachel. What is your purpose in choosing a way of life which you will be quite unable to continue?' This sounds like one of the sermons Lapa delivered to her daughter before she became a Tertiary; at that time the words were meaningless for Catherine: now they have acquired character as a spiritual seduction, and they torment her. But she is determined to be victorious, and how better can she succeed than by abandoning herself to God? Resistance and struggle wear out her strength; therefore, instead of wrestling with her thoughts and trying to answer these questions in a long exhausting interior struggle, she entrusts herself to God. She has offered herself as a bride to Christ, she is His, it is for Him to defend her.

Even in calmer natures the temptations of the senses are not soon allayed. When passion is neglected it thrusts itself forward; when repelled, it reappears in more violent form. Catherine may well close her eyes, stop her ears, hide her face in her hands—the sensual images are none the less vivid to the soul, indestructible, inescapable. Obscenities take bodily form; the strangest embraces, the most unthinkable fantastic unions, make her shudder. The more she denies them, the more they persist; she cannot shake them off. It is an oppression, an obsession, an indescribable suffering. She feels alone, bereft of Christ, until now her sweet companion. What use is her own strength to oppose such powerful and numerous enemies? The shadows thicken, the impure words multiply, the atmosphere becomes abominable. She feels her own solitude and an aridity never felt before, a dreadful emptiness in her inmost soul. She would prefer to be torn to pieces and tortured in all her limbs, or cast into the fire, rather than engage in such treacherous and disheartening conflict, with foes as changeable as the wind. In her loneliness and desolation she has moments of depression, almost of despair. But suddenly she rebels determinedly against her own flesh, and her own blood.

'Vile creature, do you think you are worthy of any consideration? Have you forgotten your sins? Who do you think you are,

wretched sinner? Would it not be worth while to bear this darkness and torment all your life and be spared eternal damnation? Why are you disconsolate and weary? If you are dispensed from the pains of Hell, Christ will be your eternal consolation. Did you choose to serve Christ so as to be able to enjoy consolations on earth, or in eternity? Arise, then, and do not weaken in your efforts—add something more, instead, to the praises you normally offer to God.'

She feels strengthened and encouraged. Moments of silence and tranquillity return and she renews her strength. She feels capable of passing through her trial. 'We must bear with joy even the worst tribulations.' She smiles and rejoices. The cell, so lately infested with monstrous apparitions and resounding with sinister words, is suddenly filled with the purest radiance, in the midst of which she sees the crucified and bleeding Christ, who says to her: 'My child, see how much I have endured for you; do not grudge this suffering for Me'. And another voice, nearer but mysterious, assures that she has won the battle.

Whoever is familiar with the lives of the Saints will find the fundamental lines of these temptations in the Life of St Anthony in the 'Fathers of the Desert', and will assume that Raimondo da Capua, working on indications given him by Catherine, reconstructed her dramatic battle of the senses, which he knew would interest his contemporaries, after the model of St Anthony's. It may also be assumed that in her solitude Catherine lived again St Anthony's experiences, which she had heard read or narrated since her childhood, and that in a psycho-physical state characteristic of the ascetic she re-lived them in unconscious imitation. But we may also believe that her experience was genuinely her own, and that its similarity to St Anthony's was due to a faith and conception of the religious life similar to his. Certainly the resemblance of subject is striking: in both the devils tempt to sin, the senses are excited, the will resists, the spirit is tormented but finally triumphs over temptation. There is light after darkness, and in the light Jesus, who speaks to the soul and praises its victory. But a great part of Christian asceticism is but the application and development of a single principle to arrive at the same end. With all Saints and ascetics we find similar practices; what is important is to find out how sincerely and intensely the various ascetics have

felt these experiences, and how much each has contributed to the progress and perfecting of ascetic practice. This vision of Catherine's, that bears certain resemblances to St Anthony's, and indeed to those of many other ascetics, has nevertheless its own peculiar colouring and contains nothing alien or contrary to her character. As we have already noticed, one of the devil's little speeches might have been one of mother Lapa's sermons to Catherine before she became a Tertiary; but even the frank impurity or obscenity in the maiden's vision has a simplicity proper to her nature. We do not find any violent eroticism such as we find in Suso, or even in St Francis when he casts himself naked into the snow to subdue his senses; however painful these impure visions were to her, still they did not overwhelm her calm and reflective nature. As she was never dominated by her senses, so even her visions are lacking in that furore that we find in other ascetics. They are generally 'intellectual visions' due to memories of words heard or facts learnt. Making a close comparison between her visions and the terrible visions of St Anthony, we find that in the latter there is rebellion against impure possession of soul and body, while with Catherine there is horror for impurity seen only as something external. In all Christian ascetic literature we see the soul resisting, tortured and finally triumphing over sin, but Catherine's experience is clearly not taken from literature but lived and experienced in full, and for one who felt so intensely the contrast between spirit and body and longed so much for integrity, even the least stain on her purity and simplicity was a heartrending grief.

The difference between the two visions is clearer in their conclusions. When St Anthony sees Jesus in the midst of the light he asks Him where He was while he, Anthony, was beaten, tortured and suffering. Jesus replies that He was there, watching to see how he would bear himself in the battle, and that as he has shown himself to be a valiant knight He now promises to come to his aid in the future. Catherine also asks the Crucified in the midst of the light where He was while she suffered so much, and why He has thus forsaken her, and Christ tells her that He was in her heart, not as a mere onlooker, but as the source of the sadness and aversion she had felt in the presence of sensuality. In St Anthony's account there is a marked distance between God and the soul,

but in Catherine's there is union and co-operation. Christ was working secretly in her soul, and the aridity and emptiness which she felt were but momentary or illusory. There is evident progress between the two visions, and Catherine's shows the experience of God always present to the spirit even when we seem to be abandoned to our weakness. The divine spirit works eternally in us without our knowing it, and it is necessary to dig deep into our inmost soul to discover Him at His secret work, even if, as in Catherine's case, this search requires efforts, mortifications, terrors, spiritual and physical suffering.

When the vision faded Catherine's cell was not completely filled with the light of God. The devils still came and went, uttering really devilish words, and seemingly amused to see her praying to be rid of them. The maiden, feeling Christ within herself, was not frightened, but those grotesque faces and the sudden appearance of changing shapes disturbed her, so that she preferred to take refuge in church, where the devils were fewer, and did not always follow her. She began to spend longer hours in church.

Her ecstasies became frequent. Tommaso da Siena, quoting from the 'Miracula' of Tommaso della Fonte, tells us that in her ecstasy Catherine heard the angels chanting in heaven—a nameless song, a strange unearthly harmony. Richard Rolle had heard a similar music, but more continuous, during his ecstasies, and the followers of Pythagoras had imagined such strains: the harmony of the spheres. Catherine was so much affected by this singing that when, a long time afterwards, she spoke of it, she heard it again and wept for joy.

At this time occurred another event of great importance for her. Constant in her attendance at religious services and prayers, she had tried to learn by heart as much as she could of the Psalms, Gospels, St Paul's Epistles and the Canonical Hours. She listened carefully to sermons and drew much benefit from these and from the conversations of her confessors—but it was a grief to her that she could not read for herself. One day a companion taught her to spell, but for many weeks she made no progress. She turned to prayer, imploring God that she might at least be able to read Lauds and the Canonical Hours. After her praying she knew that knowledge had been given her, and in fact when she tried to read

she could do so, at first stumblingly but later on with great rapidity, though almost more by intuition than by direct and tested knowledge.

How far her readings helped her in her spiritual development is hard to say, but besides the joy they gave her they were of use in providing her with copious material for reflection and meditation—and brought her into direct contact with the thought of the Saints and the Church..

The three years of seclusion were drawing to an end. She had prayed very much, and wept more, had learnt man's weaknesses and his capacity for resistance, had sought in her innermost self strength and power, and had meditated on the excellence of virtues, on human life, on God. She had experienced an extraordinary love for Christ. She had succeeded in her desire to become mistress of herself and God's slave. Harsh penances had filled her with spiritual vigour, and her judgment had become clear as spring water. In her fight against evil and evil will she had passed through the terrors of hell, but had also soared in ecstasy to the throne of the All-Highest. She knew the meaning of men's passions, their wealth, goods, pleasures and lusts, and how much the intellect is darkened by sin.

Detaching herself from all else, she had not slain love. All else was in a state of instability and dissolution, but Christ, Love, the Church endured eternally. And Christ, Love and the Church were the only foundations upon which a better world might be built. She admitted of no compromise. Where Love was lacking, where Christ did not rule, where the Church did not guide—were misery, injustice, desolation and death.

She felt herself to be a daughter of the Church, overflowing with love, and a bride of Christ, and with intense sadness she thought of the majority of mankind, without love, without Christ. She would pray for them. But this was not enough; she must do more, perhaps even sacrifice herself for them. Even as a child she had tried to do good to her neighbours, and now the idea of an apostolate, at first vague and ill-defined, caused her to reflect.

Until now she had been working to purify her own soul, and, at most, she had felt some responsibility for the souls of the Dominicans: 'She had set herself to watch and pray every day

while the Dominican friars, whom she called her brethren, were asleep. Then, when the Friars rang for Matins, after the second bell and not before, she would say to her bridegroom: "Behold, Lord, my brethren, Thy servants, have slept till now, and I have kept watch for them, before Thee, so that Thou mightest keep them from all evil, and from the snares of the fiend; but now that they have risen to praise Thee, do Thou watch and I will rest a little". But she could no longer ignore the spiritual needs of so much of mankind, and it was probably at this time that she had the vision of the tree, that Tommaso da Siena sets, instead, at the beginning of her novitiate as a Tertiary. He takes it from the 'Dialogue', but robs it of all grace and spontaneity.

The Saint dictated her own account of it: 'Know, then, that I then showed you Myself in the form of a tree, whose beginning and end you could not see, but you saw that the root was joined to the earth, and this was the divine nature joined to the earth of your humanity. At the foot of the tree, if you remember well, there was a thorn, and at the sight of that thorn all those who loved their own sensual nature ran away, and hastened to a mountain of chaff; in which form I represented to you all the delights of this world. The chaff looked like corn, but was not, and so, as you saw, many souls died of hunger in it, and many others, realising the deceitfulness of the world, returned to the tree and got past the thorn, that is, the will's decision. This decision, before it is made, is a thorn that man finds on the way to truth. Conscience and sensuality are always at war with him, but as soon as, full of self-hatred and scorn, he makes a manly decision saying: "I desire to follow Christ crucified"; immediately he breaks the thorn and finds inestimable sweetness—some more, some less, according to their disposition and eagerness.

'You know that then I said to you: "I am your unchangeable God, for I do not change; I do not draw back from any creature who desires to come to Me; I have shown them the truth, making Myself visible to them, I who am invisible; I have shown them what it means to love anything without Me. But they are as if blinded by the mist of their disordinate love; they know neither Me nor themselves; see how they deceive themselves: they would rather die of hunger than pass the thorn. They cannot escape suffering, for no one passes through this life without a cross,

except those who take the higher road; not that they pass without pain, but their suffering is their refreshment. And since through sin, as I told you above, the world brings forth thorns and tribulations, and this river flows like a stormy sea, therefore I have given you the bridge, so that you may not drown. I have shown you how those deceive themselves with disordinate love—and how I am your unchangeable God, and that I am not an acceptor of persons but of holy desire. And I have shown you this in the figure of the tree which I told you of.”’ ‘Those who are blinded by the mist of their disordinate love’ are a multitude. How is this? And what is being done to help them? These are questions that remain, latent, in Catherine’s conscience, to rouse themselves later on and receive a clear reply.

At this time Catherine was desirous of effecting a closer union with God. She had offered herself as a bride to Christ, and had considered herself as His bride; but Christ, although so close to her, speaking to her, advising her, reciting prayers and psalms with her, had not yet given her His word of consent. It was a betrothal. She wished, instead, to be wholly possessed by the Spirit, to feel herself, as it were, seized by an all-absorbing force, by a will that should subdue and take the place of her own. Rapt in this desire, she soared above herself and pleaded insistently to be accepted as a bride.

The spiritual marriage has remote origins. In embryonic form it is found in the pagan mysteries, it is hinted at in neo-Platonism. Among Christians, the fact, if not the name, is already found in some Fathers of the Church, but it is St Bernard who gives it a terminology and a development which, later on, with intellectual and practical mystics, become more and more copious, acquiring psychological exactitude with St Teresa, and theological exactitude with St John of the Cross.

The marriage marks the highest grade of spirituality that the mystic can achieve. The soul feels in every moment united to God, and there is not the slightest movement of the human being that does not harmonise with the divine. There is a permanent state of communion: two wills, one higher and one lower, are fused in fullness of joy. From the mystical phase known as ‘operative quiet’ they pass to the ‘marriage’, freeing themselves from the last vestiges of earthly attachments to live in the realm of the Absolute.

Sometimes the mystics describe only the externalities of this marriage, as it were the ceremony; one must go deeper to understand its character. 'It is a total transformation of the soul in its delight' and a merging of oneself with the divine, says St John of the Cross. Thirty years before Catherine experienced this state, Ruysbroek wrote that the spiritual marriage 'is an immersion by which we disappear in essential nakedness, where all divine names, all forms, all living thoughts, that are reflected in the mirror of eternal truth, are plunged into the sheer abyss, nameless, formless, thoughtless. Here is nought but eternal rest, a joyous embrace in which one is lost in love. . . . It is the shadowy silence in which all loving spirits are lost.'

In the 'Dialogue', when Catherine wants to describe her own immersion in the Trinity, she uses almost the same words—her own are simpler and more concrete—to describe the same fact. After all, the expressions may vary: be simple or complicated, rough or refined, clear or dark, concrete or abstract; what matters is that they should spring directly from an intensely lived experience and that through them we may get a glimpse of this experience ourselves, and feel, even from so far away, the glow of that purifying fire that burns in the breast of the mystics during their state of transforming union.

Catherine was naturally anxious to reach the highest degree of union with the divine, and implored God incessantly for this grace. One day she heard the Lord's voice, promising to espouse her. Her heart rejoiced, and she waited in trembling expectancy.

At the end of the Carnival season of 1368 Catherine was full of sadness. Her ear caught the echoes of the festivities of the Sienese people. Everywhere were dances, songs, masquerades, and bold jests. It was carnival: all must be merry, and some licence was allowed. Every family that had the means to do so gave parties and invited guests. The banquets were merry. The thought of the approaching austerities of Lent sharpened the appetite for immediate enjoyment, and everyone was gay and ate and drank more than was necessary.

Catherine's family also showed the gaiety that comes with a well-laden table. Catherine heard, reflected and suffered. It was the festival of the belly: men had not yet understood the teaching of Christ. She may have meditated on the enormous

gulf between the hard self-denying life of those who wished to live in God, and the general self-indulgence of men in those days. She turned to prayer again and implored Christ with increasing fervour, for the hundredth, thousandth time, to make her His bride, as He had promised her. During her passionate prayer she received this reply: 'Because you have cast away from yourself all vanities, and have fled from them, and, scorning the pleasures of the flesh, have placed the desire of your heart in Me alone; now, while the others of your family enjoy themselves at table or in worldly pleasures, I have resolved to solemnise My spiritual marriage with you, and, as I promised you, I take you to Myself in the faith'. And in a vision she saw the Virgin Mother, St John the Evangelist, St Paul, St Dominic and David. While David played an affectingly sweet melody on his psaltery, the Virgin Mother gently took her hand, presented her to her Son, and asked Him to take her as His bride in the faith, and Jesus, consenting, took from His robes a gold ring adorned with four precious stones and a diamond, and placing the ring on Catherine's finger, said to her: 'Behold, I, your Creator and Saviour, take you as My bride in the faith. Keep this faith pure until you celebrate the eternal espousal with Me in heaven. Act then, my daughter, henceforth manfully and without hesitations in all those things My providence will give to you do. Armed as you are with the strength of the faith, you will successfully overcome all your enemies.'

The vision disappeared, but Catherine felt 'such joy that she could hardly bear it', and, adds Raimondo da Capua, 'the ring stayed always on that finger, and although no one else could see it, Catherine always had it before her eyes, and many times she has confessed to me, blushing, that she felt it always on her finger, and there was no moment when she did not see it'.

The vision has such delicate, pure and naïve colours that analysis would but spoil it. It matters little if we see in it the remembrance of a legend, such as that of St Catherine of Alexandria, or possible the memory of a wedding ceremony she may have observed in some church. What matters is what Catherine saw and heard, and even more, that beyond the ceremony was a profound experience that later on she described for us in the 'Dialogue'.

If Catherine had been content with the vision alone she would have been a poor sort of mystic, and we might consider her as led astray by an inflamed imagination; but, going through and beyond the vision, she went forward to meet God, to be invested with His power, with which, later on, she was to perform acts that required a supernatural strength.

Chapter III

FIRST SOCIAL AND APOSTOLIC ACTIVITY

CATHERINE'S mystical ideal had been realised. Safely united to God, overflowing with love, she could now contemplate, rejoice, pray, praise to her heart's content. Ecstasies came at every moment, apparitions seemed the necessary synthesis of her desires. Vigilant and adoring, she was made free of infinity and felt the impulses of infinite love within her—a wonderful, unearthly state—but she was a creature of the earth, and so could not and must not withdraw from it entirely. She had passed out of herself, choosing the life of heaven, but she must concede something to earth and mankind.

All mystics who have experienced the spiritual marriage pass through a period when they desire to live in God and for God only, and the least glance elsewhere seems to them a shadow thrown over contemplation, or a deviation from the state of union. The earth signifies the Fall, human weakness, inferiority, impurity; one must therefore keep well away from its contamination. This is a time of spiritual absolutism, and even, in a sense, of egoism, but an understandable egoism because the supernatural inspiration of the mystics is so great and powerful that they can think of nothing else. They are, as it were, prisoners of a vivifying central idea that does not permit any secondary activity to the various human faculties. It is the hey-day of love; but when this love has reached its highest degree it re-establishes equilibrium between the finite and the infinite. The mystic who at first has felt only the need to abandon himself to God, refusing all else, now begins to understand, through this love at its highest potency, that his contact with God has taught him that earth is not to be despised, and that man must be the object of his interest. So, after a period of intimate and exclusive union, during which God and the soul are his whole world, he finds that the cosmos, and not



St Catherine kneeling before the Crucifix, by Lorenzo di Petro, called Vecchietta.
Siena, Accademia No 204. 1445

only the cosmos as an abstraction, but the earth and mankind, are the loving handiwork of God, and therefore require our thought and demand our care.

Love itself, athirst for the divine, turns of its own accord towards men. Here is the conflict between contemplation and action—not an intellectual problem that must be, or can be, resolved by reason. The mystics themselves are not clearly aware of this problem, but it arises as a need, and is resolved as a necessity, or often in obedience to a command. After the mystic has enjoyed the infiniteness of the Absolute, and has tried to contain it in himself, he becomes aware that it overflows on every side and needs a varied activity and a continual development. Why, and in what way, he wonders, must love overflow?—an enquiry that leads him to consider men in their pain, unhappiness, and separation from God. Man is wretched and suffering, because he does not possess love, that same love that he, the mystic, possesses, or by which he is himself possessed. From the heart of this love arises an imperative command: he must save others, bring joy to the joyless, and make men share in the Good that he enjoys. And so he begins to consider mankind and the earth as objects of the love that operates in him, and he feels himself a herald, an apostle; he needs to act, to share his ardour with others. Little by little the problems of others become fused with the problem of his own experience of the divine, and they become one to him. God lives in us and possesses us in as much as we sacrifice ourselves for others, and share with others the truth that we have found in Him.

Thus the mystic feels so strong an impulse towards action, formerly abhorrent to him, that no power can now hold him back, and he becomes as ready, decided and absolute in action as he had been in his quest for God, when he had seen nothing but himself and love, and the conquest of love. Then he was extended vertically, straining upwards; now he begins a horizontal and circular action that desires to reach the greatest possible number of people, over the greatest distance.

St Catherine was no exception to this law of mysticism. We have already noted how, during her spiritual espousals, Christ had warned her to hold herself ready for new and harder tasks. But there was as yet no clear conception of activity. The warning might have been interpreted as referring to spiritual difficulties,

warfare with devils, and so on. But she knew that the soul can soar no higher than the spiritual marriage, and therefore her future must be one of action. Tommaso da Siena says that while Catherine was praying in her cell 'and longing for the friendship of Christ, as she was uttering the words: "Kiss me with the kiss of Thy mouth", the Lord appeared to her and kissed her, so that she rejoiced exceedingly. She asked our Lord how she might keep Him for ever with her; He answered that the way was simple: she must never tire of doing good. In this colloquy He spoke to her so sweetly that she begged Him to withdraw her from the world, but He replied that it was not yet time for this, and insisted: "No, I want you to look after certain other people. Your life must be a guide and example to many".'

Fra Tommaso was writing after Catherine's death, and may even have added the last sentence to make the vision prophetic; but its content is psychologically true, and represents Catherine's new state of mind, so rapt in the contemplation of her Betrothed that she begged for death so that the contemplation might be endless, and so full of the thought of having God all to herself that she did not even hear His invitation to action.

Her passionate love was still for Christ alone, and she did not yet conceive the importance of action for her neighbour. This period is described by Raimondo da Capua as one in which she never willingly left her cell, and if she had to do so, and entered into conversation with anyone, 'she felt such great pain in her heart as if it were breaking'. Therefore, when she heard the order, and an explicit one, to act for others, even for her nearest relatives, she did not know, there and then, what to make of it; she was astonished, and resisted.

Raimondo da Capua, who, as usual, softens and embroiders the Saint's experiences, leaves in its integrity, beneath his embellishments, the essential moment of her passing from pure contemplation to action. Catherine had been reciting the Psalms, and reading the Hours, feeling so near to Christ that it was as if He recited and read with her. All at once she heard: 'Go, it is the hour for the mid-day repast. Your family are about to sit down to table; go and join them, and return to Me later.'

What could this mean? She did not understand this command. Had she perhaps committed some grave fault, or did her own

nothingness make her unworthy of Jesus? The words she heard were new, unexpected and cruel; she wept and rebelled. 'O God, dost Thou drive me away? If my body has sinned against Thee, I myself will inflict upon it the most atrocious penance, but I beg and implore Thee not to remove me from Thy presence.'

It is clear that she did not realise the close relation between the love of God and the love of her neighbour, and so naturally she did not see the necessity for returning to family life, and she objected: 'What does a meal matter to me? The food I need is unknown to my own kin. Thou knowest that I have withdrawn from the world, and from my own family, to be Thy bride; and now that Thou art my All, Thou tellest me to return among men—but in so doing I shall certainly lose the light I now possess, and little by little I shall become a sinner in Thine eyes.'

She feared to lose the contemplation of God, and could not yet understand that action must follow contemplation. She wished to enjoy to the full the spiritual joys, so numerous and so intense, of contemplation and union with God. Anything else would surely be inimical to this enjoyment. Courageously, even imperiously, she pleaded her own desires: 'Far be it, O Lord, from Thine immeasurable goodness to command me, or anyone else, to detach the soul from the contemplation of Thine own infinite perfection'. Her perturbation was so great that she cast herself at the feet of Christ, sobbing and imploring to be enlightened. But soon the distress of her soul was calmed, the apparent conflict resolved, and serenity returned. 'The act that I should perform today will certainly be different from my acts before I belonged wholly to God; and, besides, will not my Lord remain with me, to give me the energy needed to perform the duties He requires of me?' Perhaps the Gospel verse: 'Love God above all things, and your neighbour as yourself', came to her mind. In fact, she heard the Lord's voice in reply: 'Have no fear; you must act for the needs of others; but I do not in the least intend to detach Myself from you—rather to draw you even closer to Me through charity to your neighbour'.

It was probably at this moment that she thought out what we read in the 'Dialogue': 'When the eternal Truth has been conceived in man's soul through affection of love, he must at once pass it on to his neighbour; otherwise it would not be the Truth that he has

conceived. But as in very truth he loves Me, so he ministers to the needs of his neighbour; and this cannot be otherwise, for love of Me and love of his neighbour are one and the same thing, and the more a man loves Me, the more he loves his neighbour, because his love for him proceeds from Me.'

This is a true description of divine love in action—needing a richer experience to express itself more exactly. This experience was to be Catherine's later, but the first germ of this conception must have been born in this moment of her life.

After a little reflection she recognised that Jesus' command was just, and must be obeyed; yielding her will to Him, she said: 'Thy will be done, O Lord!' Action, however, was a grave task. The Saints and mystics had performed extraordinary works among men, but they were Saints, and great ones: how could she presume so much? She saw that action would be difficult, although she no longer objected to it in principle. She heard God repeating within her soul: 'The soul that is in love with My Truth is never tired of ministering to the needs of the whole world'. She still demurred: 'That is all very well for men, but where and how can I, a wretched woman, be useful to others? Also, it is not fitting for women to teach and preach; men have no esteem for them and, moreover, it is unseemly for a woman to have to do with men.'

This was the last flicker of resistance. The thought of an apostolate was already taking possession of her mind, and growing stronger. Divine love had been working in her without her knowledge; she now felt her soul so full of it that it must needs overflow. She could no longer resist. 'But the soul that is in love with My Truth is never tired of ministering to the needs of the whole world.'

Now she heard God's voice with all her former joy, and her sense of His presence grew no less. 'Thy will be done, O Lord', she repeated, and this time she bowed to Christ, once more present to her eyes. Then at once 'she quickly left her cell and went to join her family, and seated herself at table with them'.

She had obeyed the call of love; the conflict between action and contemplation had been resolved, and she could no longer distinguish between them. There was no longer anything but one mighty operating Spirit, who worked through her and all things else.

Her biographers do not describe the effect on her family of Catherine's unexpected appearance at table, nor do they tell us what influence her confessors had over her, but as the Dominicans did not conceive of a purely and solely contemplative life they must have approved of her action.

Raimondo da Capua says that her first spiritual directors did not understand her. One must however remember that this was the period of the heretical 'beghine' and it behoved them to stand on their guard. Catherine might be deceiving herself in her visions, and in her confident sense of the immanent presence of God. Her experiences were certainly out of the ordinary, and her mortifications excessive; she was very imaginative and very eloquent. There had been among the Tertiaries many visionaries, of exemplary life and apparently possessing extraordinary gifts, who had none the less been condemned by the Church. It was better to withhold judgment. And among the Preaching Friars, accustomed, in general, to close reasoning and much study, some were sceptical about her, some uncertain, some followed her doings with interest, but without giving a verdict one way or another.

Tommaso della Fonte ought perhaps to have known her state of mind better than the others; but he was not a man of great gifts, or even of shrewd perceptions. A commonplace Friar, he devoutly performed his duties as a Christian and a priest, but could not discern the originality of a spirit like Catherine's. We must suppose that his advice was of mediocre value. When Tommaso began to write the 'Miracula', that is, an account of the Saint's extraordinary actions, he did so under the influence of his confrère Bartolomeo Dominici, who from 1368 onwards was the real discoverer of the genius and spirituality of Catherine. Encouraged by the judgment of this young but learned Dominican, who understood mysticism, Tommaso then became an attentive observer of Catherine's experiences, and began to understand her intellectual and religious superiority, openly admiring her.

Did Catherine find any support among the Mantellate? Raimondo da Capua tells us flatly that the Sisters understood nothing about her, in fact they opposed her, and caused her many vexations. How could these mediocre Christians understand the Saint's outbursts and ecstasies? Their religious world was made up of prescribed devotions, limited duties and ritual formalism—

such as satisfy ordinary folk. They did not feel the overpowering need to soar above all heavens to reach God, nor did they know the bitterness of spiritual conflict. Most of them were probably good women in the current meaning of the word, but the good they did was the small change of charity that satisfied their conscience. They must have wondered why Catherine lived in such absolute seclusion, and mortified herself so mercilessly. It was surely unnecessary to overstep the limits of ordinary humanity. For Catherine, who broke all barriers and soared above humanity, there could be no sympathy from her fellow Mantellate. However, there were among these Tertiaries some who listened attentively to what was said about the virgin of Fontebranda, and desired not only to speak to her but to remain with her, so as to be sharers in her graces; a desire that was fulfilled as soon as Catherine entered the world.

In religious circles in Siena there must have been talk about this Tertiary who left her cell only to go to church, ate nothing, drank very little, slept very little, and yet spoke beautifully about divine things, was always cheerful, and experienced visions and frequent ecstasies. Opinions about her must have been very varied, some considering her a Saint, others even calling her an impostor.

Siena was a city of intense religious life. In the thirteenth century, aware of its danger on the eve of the Battle of Monteperti, the city had offered itself to the Blessed Virgin, invoking her aid. After the victory, it had in gratitude added to its motto '*Sena vetus*' the words '*Civitas Virginis*'. Every generation had produced at least one saint, whose extraordinary works or miracles or visions were narrated and discussed in the town. Andrea Gallerani, who died in 1251, had instituted the charitable Order of the Brothers of Mercy; Ambrogio Sansedoni, who died in 1287, had laboured long for peace in his city, praying with the poor, tending the sick, aiding pilgrims. The people loved to remember Agnese di Montepulciano, who died in 1317, relating how fresh flowers sprang out of the earth where she prayed, and how she had made rise from the ground a miraculous spring of water, which is still to be seen today: the well of Sant'Agnese. The Augustinian Friar, Agostino Novello, had performed many miracles and works of mercy before he died in 1309; many still remembered

the first Constitutions he drew up for the Hospital of Santa Maria della Scala, and his great love for the poor and sick. Was not the great Abbey of Monte Oliveto, that became more celebrated every year, the creation of Sieneſe ascetics in 1319? And who did not recall Francesco Patrizi, the Servite whose life of penance, humility and charity had ended in 1328? Selva di Lago, or Lecceto (the ilex wood) was spoken of with great respect, for there were gathered ascetics, prophets, contemplatives, and religious enthusiasts who studied the ways of God and did penance for the sins of men. Monasteries flourished in Siena; in 1310 there were twenty-eight, with 651 Friars, subsidised by the Commune.

When a famous preacher came to the city he was welcomed enthusiastically, and the whole population turned out to meet him. The Sieneſe interest in religion was shown also by the incidence of heresy, which was fairly lively during the fourteenth century. In 1321, for example, a great theological dispute took place. A man of high position, Baroccino Barocci, a follower of the Nine, had arrayed against him all the Doctors of Theology of the city, who declared him heretical. He was shown his error, and many attempts were made to induce him to retract, but he was obdurate. Finally the Inquisitor and the Bishop condemned him to death by burning, and he perished in this way, without retracting any part of his opinion, and refusing to be shriven. He had many fellow heretics in the city. In fact, Bishop Ruggero was always harrying them without much success. Later on came the persecutions of the heretics undertaken by the Inquisitors, who exploited their power so much that in 1340 the Commune was obliged to pass a law against Inquisitorial abuses.

But we find the greatest expression of Sieneſe religious feeling in Giovanni Colombini, and most of the talk in the city in Catherine's time must have been about him. He had died a few years before she began her social work, and shortly before his death he had been commended and helped by Pope Urban V, on his return to Italy. Because of rumours current about him, he had been examined by the Inquisitors, who had declared him entirely orthodox, thus increasing his fame. A strange man, but full of faith, ardour and charity, he was becoming one of the glories of Siena. Untaught, he had acquired for himself the wisdom of love, spontaneous, immediate and proved. He lived for God and

for the salvation of souls, doing good wherever and whenever he could. Those who had known him formerly as a rich business man, elegant and self-indulgent, and now saw him working as a street sweeper, scullion or grave-digger, bearing firewood or turning the spit before scorching fires—all for the love of his fellows—were deeply moved; some knew that one day he had placed a leper in his own bed, laying him in linen sheets, and had washed and perfumed him, and then, as if caring for him as a brother were not sufficient mortification, had drunk the water with which he had washed him. They may have found this gesture exaggerated, but none the less denoting an unusual fervour of charity.

He was called 'the charitable Giovanni', and whoever met him when he was crying out: 'Long live Christ throughout all the world in the hearts of all His creatures!', may have taken him for a simpleton; yet that cry, coming from such depths, must have stirred the hearts of those who heard it. Sometimes he would be seen crossing the scorched fields under the blazing sun, drunk with love for Jesus, or bare-footed and bare-headed, singing hymns to his Creator in the rain. And cheerfully, at all times and in all places, he offered his services to his fellow-men.

Who knows the thoughts of those who saw him, by his own desire, dragged half-naked, bound with a halter, through the streets of San Giovanni ad Asso, sweeping the ground with his body, and making open confession of his former cheating in that place—for he had robbed the peasants by lending them maggoty corn and then demanding the best in return? Besides being amazed, the onlookers must have been deeply affected spiritually, because in these actions, that sometimes resembled madness, he always observed a certain measure, and was inspired to perform them by sincere repentance and true humility. In Siena there was such dismay when he was banished that when the plague broke out shortly afterwards, the people thought that it was a punishment for having exiled him unjustly, and they forced the Twelve to recall him at once.

His admonitions, speeches, letters went all round the city. His disciples, and the Abbess and Nuns of Santa Bonda, waited eagerly upon Colombini's burning words, and many other devout folk zealously sought after his letters, to have fervid spiritual reading

that might help them to progress in the way of Christ. All was centred in the love of Christ—for man was here to love Him. 'For what more can we do for Him than love Him? You know that He has no need of our services, and does not consider them, except in so far as they are rendered with loving charity, and when He is loved with purest charity, He gives Himself to our soul. Then the soul feels such wealth and such well-being as no tongue can express, for Christ transforms the soul entirely into Himself, causes it to dissolve in tears, to melt, to writhe with devotion.'

The devout are induced to meditate on this 'transforming' and 'melting' and 'writhe' and find in them a synthesis of asceticism. Colombini knew, and preached to all, that the soul, when inflamed with love, almost loses itself in Christ, and, despising the world, yearns to perform great things for love, thinking only of perfection, which is loving all, doing good to all, and, more especially, blessing and helping those who are hostile.

No contemporary writer tells us whether Catherine knew of the life and work of Colombini, or read any of his letters, but although she had lived until now as a recluse, she must have heard of this godly man that all Siena was talking about, and who had been in touch with the Dominicans of Camporegio.

We have no proof of Catherine having read any of his letters, but when we examine the writings of both, we are led to believe that many of the same, or similar, expressions, and certain conceptions common to both, cannot be accounted for merely by the similarity of their religious experiences. They are typical and personal phrases: 'He who loves has Christ, who is Love'; 'Love leads to Love'; 'Wash your lamps, that is, clean your hearts and fill them with the oil of humility and all the virtues, and then light the flame of charity within, so that when the Bridegroom appears, you may follow Him and go to the nuptials with Him'; 'The greater the affliction the greater the consolation'; 'Setting the whole world beneath your feet'. There are many of such phrases which Catherine seems to have borrowed from Colombini, which leads us to suppose that she had read his letters, or had listened attentively when someone expounded their contents.

She called the devil 'Malatasca', and many, including Raimondo da Capua himself, have expressed their admiration for this nickname which they thought to be her own invention, a Dan-

tesque fancy—but the name can be found in the 90th letter of Colombini, addressed to the Abbess and Nuns of Santa Bonda: 'And so you must pray, and you know how necessary that is, because Malatasca the devil will not sleep, and will do all he knows how to, and can'.

Moreover, sharing so many affinities of character and faith, Catherine must have felt drawn to study his work and writings. She may even have recognised in him a forerunner, or a loving teacher, and a soul that had passed through spiritual and apostolic experiences that were one day, enriched with so much more emotional and mental power, to be her own.

Accustomed as Catherine was to solitude and soliloquy, she found all companionship, even that of her own kin, irksome. When torn away from her spiritual colloquies and precious visions, she was irritated by ordinary conversation, so superficial and insignificant. At table her family talked about business, about events in the neighbourhood or city, or of gossip. She felt alien to these subjects. Here at hand were her first untried weapons in the struggle to adapt herself to living, voluntarily, with people who spoke and thought differently from herself, but she had not yet discovered that other souls may throb in unison with ours if we show sympathy for their world, and that to fit in with a mood alien to our own is an exercise in humility that increases love. Certainly, the many hours of blissful joy passed in ecstasies were still too recent, and her thoughts too much accustomed to remaining within their central source of light, so that to remove herself from it was for her like plunging into darkness, and like emptying her soul of life. Therefore the hours spent with other people seemed to her like months and years, and as soon as she had an excuse she would leave any company to flee to her cell, with ever more ardent zeal to adore Christ there and invoke His appearance. During these months, in which contact with others was so burdensome, she went more frequently to Communion, to find a closer sense of union with the divine—to have Christ more often present to her senses.

But even if she was still uncertain about the efficacy of her work among those of her own family, and still instinctively sought to withdraw, she yet felt the impulse of love within her—urging her to act for others' good. In a house like her own, how could she busy

herself except in domestic matters? So the frail Catherine began to sweep and clean, beat carpets and clothes, make beds, help in the kitchen, make the bread and do the washing—to lend a hand here, there and everywhere. One day the servant fell ill, so she insisted on taking her place and doing all her work. She was seized by a sort of mania for work; besides doing all the servant's work herself, she waited on her and tended her with loving care. She began to feel the joy of action, and the happiness of dedicating herself to others. Once before, after her sister Bonaventura's death, she had waited on her family, but how different her state of mind was then! At that time she was undergoing punishment, and obeying her family's orders, and, in spite of her cheerful appearance, she was sad and wistful; now, instead, she was working of her own accord in obedience to an inner voice, and she knew that all her sacrifices were useful and pleasing to Christ. Her heart exulted and her face shone with joy.

The harder she worked the more closely she felt her union with the divine. She began to understand the reason for this command to action that her soul had received, and to realise that action is never divorced from contemplation. Even when sweeping or washing dishes, or turning the roast on the spit, all at once she would feel herself seized and rapt in an ecstasy, almost as if this were the reward of her obedience. At those times an ignorant onlooker must have felt perturbed. One can imagine the dismay of Lapa, who felt her daughter's way of life as a personal calamity, when one day she saw her 'with her hands and feet numb, all twisted, and her fingers pressed as hard into the palms of her hands as if they were nailed there, so that no strength could detach them. Her eyes were closed and her neck quite stiff'; indeed a terrifying spectacle for Lapa. And as Catherine's neck was awry, she wanted for pity's sake to straighten it, and who knows what might have happened if one of Catherine's fellow Tertiaries had not warned Lapa in time of the danger of forcing her daughter's limbs during an ecstasy—and she was always falling into ecstasies. Once she was turning the roast on the spit when all at once she dropped everything and fell over the fire; only by a miracle did she escape being burnt.

Action leads to action, and Catherine's generous and enterprising character could not be restricted to working within the

confined circle of her own home. The need for greater scope led her to succour the poor and the sick. Whether in this she was advised and guided by the Dominicans, or acted on orders from the Prioress of the Mantellate, or on her own impulse, we are not told. The Tertiaries had merely the duty of looking after their own sick or needy Sisters, but we know that in Siena they visited hospitals and prisons, enlarging the obligations of their Rule. They may have entrusted to her some works of mercy, and it may be that her first companions were in this way drawn to her in affection and admiration—but we cannot be sure of this. According to Raimondo da Capua, the wish to help the poor came to her spontaneously, in obedience to the ever more imperious voice of her conscience, and as a result of the devout sermons and conversations she had read or heard.

As soon as she began to work for her family, she found that Christ was still with her, as close as He had been in her solitude; indeed, her ecstasies became more frequent. She remembered the delightful legends of St John the Almsgiver, and of St Nicholas, and was inspired by St Francis' total renunciation of the goods of this world, and by the thought of Colombini, who had given all his wealth away—but what could she do? She possessed nothing, either of her own or in common. It was true that a disciple of Francesco Patrizi, Rosa Berardi, who died in Siena about 1348, had given away in charity everything she could find in her house, pots and pans as well as clothes, and has been severely scolded by her parents for so doing—but Catherine did not want to irritate her family. So she thought of asking her father's permission to give to the poor and needy what in their house 'the Lord had granted to him and his family'. Permission was generously given. She enjoyed her charity, and it was open-handed. But it was also subtle and wary. She set aside the professional poor, to help those who suffered without begging. Those who appealed to her had to endure her sweet but heart-searching glance, that discovered any deceit. She preferred to find out for herself the real needy, to choose her own poor. Once, for example, when she learnt that some neighbours were in great poverty, but ashamed to ask for help, she collected in her own house corn, wine, olive oil, and other necessities, and the next morning, as soon as she could go out, hastened to carry everything to their home. She very softly

opened the door—it is the habit of poor folk to leave doors ajar—and put the food inside the room, then hastened away so as not to be seen.

Another time she was told that a widow with many little children had nothing to eat. Catherine was in bed, because her limbs were swollen and she could not stand upright. Painfully she rose, gathered together what she could find at home, a bag of corn, a flask of wine, a jar of oil, and as soon as the bell rang at dawn, before which no one was allowed to be in the streets, she went rapidly to the widow's home. She was laden, holding things with both arms, on her shoulders, tied to her girdle—Raimondo da Capua says the weight was about two hundred pounds. After the first swift joyful steps she began to feel over-burdened; then the load became intolerable; she stopped for a moment, drew breath, and prayed. She gathered her strength together to arrive at her goal, and just reached it. The door was ajar; she pushed it a little to put down the food, just inside, but in ridding herself of her burden she made some noise and the poor woman awoke. Catherine tried to flee, but the strain had exhausted her. Her nerves were stretched to such a point that she was incapable of movement, and her will seemed powerless. Still not wishing to be seen, she prayed to God, then turned on her own body with a 'You shall walk, even if you die of it!' Almost on all fours she dragged herself away, but not before the widow, who had risen and run to the door, had seen and recognised her.

One day, pitying a poor man who was asleep in church, she began to pray for him. All at once she felt inspired to go and slip something under his head. While she was on her way to him the poor man arose and came towards her, saying: 'I beg you for the love of God, to give me something to cover me'. She at once took off her cloak and gave it to him; then she led him home with her and gave him a shirt. These were loving deeds graced by delicacy of feeling. She put her whole self into her actions, and the useful material gift acquired a meaning of its own because it was vivified by her generous spirit. In those moments Christ, her soul, and the recipient of her charity were fused in one; she suffered for the needy as much as they did themselves, even more, because of her lively and sensitive imagination; and while she prayed for them she enfolded them in a mantle of generous sympathy, and never

caused them the slightest humiliation. She said, it was they who helped her. She was a sinner, a great sinner—hence the cause of their suffering. It was they who benefited her; in fact, they received nothing from her; it was Christ who received, He to whom she owed all.

Her visions still continued. The little silver cross she believed she had given to a poor man in church appeared again in her Bridegroom's hands, but enriched with precious gems. And the tunic she had given to a poor woman was seen again, beautiful and adorned, worn by Christ Himself. There was no doubt about it: the poor *were* Christ: charity took on a mystical meaning. Her industry never flagged; she began to visit the hospitals and tend the sick. Her fame spread through the poorer quarters of Siena, and around her gathered a clientèle of unfortunates. She was good to all, and helped them to the limit of her power. She was said to perform miracles, and was sought after. The miserable begged for her prayers, knowing her to be a friend of God. 'This young woman has so much glowing charity that she receives very lovingly all who beg her to pray for them, and promises to do so very willingly. And then when she sets herself to pray for all her petitioners, usually at night, she not only prays most fervently for them, but often for their sakes gives herself such strokes of the discipline as to draw blood.' And when once she was asked how she could remember in her prayers all those who had petitioned her, especially when she did not know them and their number was almost infinite, she replied: 'When a servant of God prays His Eternal Majesty most piteously and with exceeding ardour and fervour of holy charity for the welfare of sinners, God of His grace allows her to see with the eye of her soul all those for whom she prays'.

One of her miracles struck the popular fancy. It has its remote origin in the wedding at Cana, and Bartolomeo di Domenico describes it thus:

'It happened that Catherine's father forbade his family to decant wine from a certain cask in his cellar, because, as this was the best wine, he wanted to keep it to the last. When Catherine, who never drank wine, but only pure water, heard this, she reflected that the best wine ought to be given to the poor; and as she had full permission from her father to distribute, for the love of God,

whatever she wished, putting her trust in the Lord she began to give away flask after flask of that wine to her poor sick folk. When her father wished to drink this special wine he sent the servant to decant it, and as the servant did not return he sent his married son to scold her and bring it. But the servant came back to say that without doubt the cask was empty. The father and son, and others of the family, grumbled at her, and the son insisted on going himself to get the wine. He stayed a long time and then returned empty-handed, saying that the cask was indeed empty. The father was very cross with the whole family, demanding who had presumed so impudently to disobey his express command. The holy virgin heard her father's angry words and saw the whole family upset. Knowing what had happened, her conscience was stirred, and trusting in God, she came forward to calm the angry scene: "Why are you so angry, my good father?" Hearing the reason, she replied: "Have patience, my father; I will go myself to decant the wine". Going down into the cellar, she knelt down by the cask and prayed to God very trustfully: "O Lord, Thou knowest that the wine has been used to help the poor—and Thou knowest that I have done this in Thy name. Do not permit me, O Lord, for this to be made a cause of scandal to my father and all the family." She rose, and made the sign of the Cross over the cask and behold! the wine came pouring from the spigot. First she thanked God, then took the wine to her father, saying nothing of the miracle; and all those who had tried in vain to draw the wine were struck dumb with amazement.' The wine lasted for more than two months, for the use of all Catherine's family as well as for her poor folk, instead of lasting a month for the family alone. When the vintage season came round, and they wanted to empty the cask, to fill it with new wine, they were all amazed to see that it was bone dry, as if it had stood empty for many months.

Catherine's father, the only one of her family who had shown some understanding of her religious fervour, fell gravely ill in August 1368. Throughout his illness Catherine was his loving nurse, and prayed for his recovery; but when she was sure that he would die very soon, fearing he might have to pass through Purgatory, she offered herself in sacrifice, so that her father might be spared all future punishment. She prayed with such conviction that suddenly she felt a sharp pain in her side, and

it was revealed to her that this pain, that she was to bear all her life, was her father's ransom. Sure now that he would not suffer in the world beyond, she went to his bedside to reassure him, and then assisted him as he breathed his last. As soon as Giacomo di Benincasa died, Catherine's face became cheerful and smiling, and she told those present that she envied his lot. When she had washed him and laid him out, she watched by him all that day, and spoke comfortingly to her disconsolate mother and grieving family, giving them courage and serene resignation.

For what was death, if not life itself? And why should we weep for those who leave us, when we are sure they are better off than we are? It is true that here below all tends to bind us to an existence that, in the long run, brings us more hardships than pleasures. From childhood on, our education is at fault, fostering in us vain desires and notions of the necessity of money, of possession, of power, of attachment to things and creatures, to honour and fame. And all seems lost if any of these things fail us. We believe ourselves to be necessary to others, as they to us, and we form attachments without which life ceases to have any meaning. In this way we lose the sense of absolute liberty, and build up a whole world of bonds and chains amounting to spiritual slavery. Man's breathing space has been restricted by his own desire, and he no longer enjoys the vast realms of the spirit in which all can find grandeur and joy. Our eyes are no longer raised towards the lofty heavens, and we have no part in their immensity. Our interest is all concentrated in material possessions and in attachment to creatures: infinite poverty. But Catherine, detached as she was from this way of living, judged things very differently. She considered everything in its relation to eternity, and to salvation in this life and beyond. Integral Christianity: the creation of a life that had love for its constructive element, serenity for its atmosphere, the infinite for its aspiration. In the immense depth and fullness of love, our affections, attachments, joys, even doubts, uncertainties, hesitations and griefs still throb with life, but their power is neither decisive nor tyrannical. What we normally consider as necessities, and strive after, or wear ourselves out in attaining, are really nothing and should be regarded with indifference. Once we admit that our lives are continued and perfected in infinity, the existence of our dearest ones cannot be thought of as

broken off by death. There are no breaches of continuity: life is one and eternal. Every day, in every hour, we must strive to win for ourselves a future, and become worthy of the great love in which we are to merge. So death is destroyed and only life exists.

Every now and then Tommaso della Fonte brought some fellow priest to see Catherine. These visits gave her pleasure and satisfied the curiosity of her visitors, and Tommaso was able to gather various judgments and impressions about her, for as he was her confessor he was in a certain sense responsible for her conduct to the Order, to the city, to God. One day in 1368 he took Fra Bartolomeo di Domenico to see her. Fra Bartolomeo was about the same age as himself, and had been his fellow novice. He had a liking for literature, was intelligent, alert, observant, and had a special fondness for theology. He gave himself much to the study of religious problems, was reflective and calm in his judgments, and of a humility that set his teaching in stronger relief. Anxious to understand ascetics and mystics, he was interested in their problems, maintaining a slight scepticism about some of the extraordinary events of their lives. He was of upright character, and a generous and affectionate nature. He already enjoyed a certain esteem in the Order. Little did he think that his visit to Catherine was to his future teacher, and that he would have a real Saint for friend.

On first entering the cell he was struck by the narrowness and darkness of the place—doors and windows always closed, and only one lamp burning before the images of Christ, Mary, and some Saints. He was shocked to see the planks that served for the recluse's bed, but still more touched by her gaiety and purity. It was the first time he had felt such a sensation in the presence of a woman. Until then, with all women, even those of advanced years, he had always been aware of their sex, but now, instead, no impure thought entered his mind. He saw something angelic in Catherine, and at once became her devoted admirer.

Fra Bartolomeo does not tell us about his first conversation with Catherine, but we know that although he revered her for her faith, her purity, sincerity, austerity and charitable work, he did not at first believe in her supernatural manifestations. One day he was in her cell, talking with her and Fra Tommaso, she suddenly asked him: 'What were you doing last night, during the

second and third hours?' The two Friars asked her: 'What do you think we were doing?' 'Who knows better than you?', answered Catherine. Then her confessor, in agreement with Fra Bartolomeo, ordered her, under obedience, to tell them what they were doing at that time; but she humbly refused to reply, excusing herself again. When her confessor then insisted that she should speak, she replied humbly: 'You know well that there were four of you in the Sub-Prior's cell, and you were speaking nearly all the time about the salvation of our souls, intermingling other subjects from time to time.' When asked who were these four, she gave their names. Fra Bartolomeo was dumbfounded, but still clung to the idea that one of the Fathers might have told her of this. The next day he went to her and asked her if she knew what he had been doing the evening before at a certain hour. She told him calmly that he had been writing, and moreover told him what he had written. The Dominican had no more doubts about her: Catherine had the gift of second sight, and so those stories of her prophecies or visions at a distance, current in the city, must be true. He became an assiduous visitor to Catherine's cell, and she, for her part, was glad to have found a learned Friar who understood her, and with whom she could speak of theological questions about which she desired to meditate, but which she feared, in her ignorance, to have imperfectly understood. Thus began a mutual exchange of help. Fra Bartolomeo instructed her in religious knowledge, and discussed grave ecclesiastical questions, and she, with her tact and intuition, made of him 'a soul enamoured and strengthened in the blood of Christ'.

Fawtier believes, I think mistakenly, that the Order of Preaching Friars added Fra Bartolomeo to Tommaso della Fonte as an extra confessor, the better to supervise the Tertiary and maintain her within strict orthodoxy. The friendship between Catherine and Fra Bartolomeo, however, arose quite spontaneously, through a mutual spiritual sympathy fostered by his admiration for her sanctity and her admiration for his learning. It is true that all the Dominicans watched over the faithful lest they should fall into heresy, and in Catherine's case also the supervision was no doubt attentive, but always through the Friar's own initiative, not in obedience to a command. Before long the Order was too busy itself with Catherine, but at the moment of which we speak her

fame was still restricted, and the Order saw no need to intervene.

The mutual affection of this intellectual friendship is expressed in the letters that Catherine wrote to Fra Bartolomeo. She writes as one sure of being understood, and her thoughts flow impulsively and richly; she does not need to explain or simplify, but lets the fullness of her spirit overflow. On the contrary, when she writes to Fra Tommaso della Fonte, it is with great respect and care, and if every now and then even with him she lets her overflowing love have its way, she corrects herself at once, lowers her tone, calculates how far she can be understood, and tries to adapt herself to his upright but somewhat pedestrian soul. Fra Bartolomeo, besides being her spiritual father, is always her 'brother and most beloved and dearest son', while Fra Tommaso remains merely her 'dearest and most beloved spiritual father'.

We find a mark of Catherine's tenderness towards Fra Bartolomeo in the *Supplementum* of Tommaso da Siena: 'Fra Bartolomeo, who was the virgin's second confessor, was once conversing with her and her first confessor, when during the conversation he told her he felt a strange and unendurable malaise, his head full of heaviness and strange fancies. She was sorry for him, and placing her hand on his brow, said: "I do not want those things to be here within". Then, raising her eyes to heaven, she added: "O Lord, I do not wish any to remain here", and she made over him the sign of the Cross with her hand. Fra Bartolomeo at once felt relief in mind and body, as if he had never known and felt that discomfort and pain in his head.'

A little circle of admirers and friends were forming around Catherine: Dominicans, Tertiaries, recipients of her bounty or petitioners for it. Among the religious the 'case' of the Sister of Fontebranda was variously judged; the people knew only that she was good, very good, and worked miracles. Those who spoke with her were amazed at her eloquence; Fra Bartolomeo di Domenico, himself a student of literature and fine speech, said she was 'wonderfully eloquent when she spoke of the honour of God and the salvation of souls', and Tommaso da Siena, perhaps quoting from Tommaso della Fonte, wrote that 'she was very attractive, and all who came near her, men or women, of whatever rank or profession, were made better by her, and led back to God'.

It was natural that some pious women on discovering her extraordinary gifts should at once approach her and desire to become her companions. They were of no exceptional intelligence, and left no trace in her history except as having been her faithful followers, or having helped her in her practical activity. One of her first companions was Francesca (or Cecca) di Clemente Gori, a widow, who had three sons in the Order of Preaching Friars, and a daughter who was a Dominican nun at Montepulciano; Cecca was a Tertiary, and there was a great affection between her and Catherine. Later came the noble Alessa Saracini, also a Tertiary, who was to receive Catherine into her own home later on, and who, as well as Cecca, sometimes acted as her secretary.

In her own family Catherine found herself admired by her sister-in-law Lisa, a Colombini by birth, but not of the family of the Blessed Giovanni. She was a gentle pious girl who observed Catherine's spiritual development, knew of her struggles and victories, was present during her ecstasies, and shared some of her ideas. Lisa believed in her sister-in-law's miraculous powers; she 'knew her well and loved to talk with her, and put great trust in her', says Tommaso da Siena, so much so that she insisted on having her with her twice during childbirth. The second time the Saint's help was necessary, and miraculous—as also was her intervention after the child was born, for Lisa had no milk to feed him, and through Catherine's prayers her milk returned.

Among those who visited Catherine in her cell, taken there by Fra Tommaso della Fonte, was Tommaso da Siena, generally known as Caffarini. He was very young, sixteen or seventeen, when he saw her for the first time, and was at once filled with admiration. From then on he observed her constantly, whenever he could, in church, in conversations, prayers, social activity, raptures, ecstasies. He was practically-minded, and more amazed at the blood shed by Catherine in her scourgings than at the wisdom with which she solved spiritual problems. Her miracles impressed him enormously, and he made a collection of them, accepting even the most fantastic and ludicrous versions. He was so fond of the extraordinary that nothing that others told him about her seemed extraordinary enough. Instead of warming himself at the flame of her inner life, he preferred to excite his fancy with

astounding external facts. Besides being a man of action he was himself an eloquent preacher, but his actions and his eloquence had nothing in common with those of the Saint. Catherine was out to transform hearts and minds; he was bent on amazing his hearers, transporting them to an atmosphere of miracle and keeping them there. He could not penetrate the human and divine mysteries of the soul; but he wanted others to recognise her obvious virtues and piety. He was sure that Catherine was a great woman, without being able to understand her real greatness, or its source. When preaching or saying Mass he was pleased to see her present, attentive and devout; he was much impressed at the sight of the marks of her teeth on the silver chalice from which she had drunk the Communion wine; but he never cast a glance at her soul, often suffering torments to win another victory over life, for she mortified her spirit more than her body to grasp the eternal. Perhaps because of his lack of understanding of profound spiritual life there was never between Catherine and him a close and enlightened friendship such as she enjoyed with Bartolomeo Dominici and later with Raimondo da Capua. In a letter that Catherine sent him in 1379 there is no sign of any particular affection or affinity of spirit, and if the letter sent him in March 1374 was more loving and ardent, this is because it had not been written for him alone, but also, and especially, for Fra Bartolomeo. The letter that Fra Tommaso da Siena sent to Catherine contained the correction of an interpretation of the Psalm '*Domine, non est exaltatum cor meum*' given her in a conversation, for which he now wished to substitute an explanation he had found in the works of St Augustine. It was a cold scholastic letter, showing no interest in the spiritual meaning of the Psalm, or of St Augustine's words, that would have been of great interest to Catherine. The letter is dated 1374, when Fra Tommaso was twenty-four, an age when enquiry into the possibilities of interior life generally exercises great attraction. His chronicler tells us that he knew more about divine than about human things, and often went into ecstasies, but there is no sure proof of this, and we do not find in his writings, even about Saints and holy women, any profound ascetical or mystical knowledge, either drawn from his own experience, or that of others. The relations between Catherine and Fra Tommaso da Siena were friendly, even coloured with a gentle

maternal and filial affection, but with no sign of intimate understanding, or the mutual devotion that leads to spiritual progress.

Nevertheless, this Friar was the chief assertor of Catherine's greatness and worked harder than anyone else to have her canonised. And his praise of her implies a glorification of her inner life even if he was unable to enter into it. This is no small merit of his, and we must praise his constancy in pursuing his chief aim for so many years. Catherine's sanctification was no doubt expected to add more glory to the Dominican Order, and so to rival the glory of the Franciscans. Nor must we exclude a little personal ambition. But it is not for us to submit the Friar to a somewhat harsh examination, as Fawtier has done, with arguments, sometimes valid, sometimes exaggerated, at times quite erroneous. It is enough for us to know that Tommaso was from his early youth Catherine's admirer and disciple, and certainly never spoke of her to her followers or acquaintances without great admiration.

Catherine's women companions would not allow her to conduct her own apostolate, and they began taking her here and there, wherever they thought was a case for her compassion. They did not realise that she needed an activity quite out of the ordinary, so that her soul might expand and reach out towards God. It was not really her mission to say a kind word to those afflicted with the usual ills of life, to incite to the love of God those not possessed by evil spirits, to minister to every-day needs, observe puny and trifling passions, and suffer for those who had not been ground down in the mill of life. She did all this, in obedience and humility, but could not put the whole of herself into it. Were not there other kind and charitable people who could in such cases obtain almost the same results? She must have thought in her heart that she was on the wrong road; her energy for action flagged and dwindled, so that her spirit shrank accordingly; in fact, when she found herself unwillingly brought into contact with so many people her soul seemed drawn away to Himself by Christ. Considering this as a warning, she began to complain to her confessor: 'You see, Father, I cannot stay talking with people. I feel drawn away, even sensibly, to my Bridegroom Jesus Christ. I beg you to forbid me to go about.' Tommaso da Siena, perhaps repeating a remark of Tommaso della Fonte, explained: 'She begged him to do this, because her companions took her here and

there doing good; she was very persuasive in her speech, and at her words people were wonderfully seized by the fear and love of God.'

In the absence of sure indications, we judge on psychological grounds that it must have been at this time that she began to care assiduously for those in direst need—*les grands malheureux*. She chose her own needy, avoiding mediocrity. She visited, fed and consoled a prostitute whom everyone else avoided, fearing to soil themselves by approaching her. No one would even toss her a piece of bread. Catherine saw the wretched woman's forsaken condition, understood the despair in her soul, and forced herself to care for her, and to kindle in her heart a fire of love very different from that which, mingled with pain and humiliation, she had known in her life. She knew that earthly love may lead to divine love, and her own loving protectress, Mary Magdalen, had experienced this sublime transition. A prostitute may understand what is meant by a passionate outburst of love towards God, and may cry out in her enthusiasm more fervently than many wise and devout folk, who are incapable of entering deeply into the human soul, with its miseries and grandeurs. The maiden of Fontebranda understood this and spared no pains, perhaps to the scandal of some, in nursing and helping the abandoned prostitute. She was sure she would find in her a light, dimmed but not quenched by sin, that the careless, scornful passers-by never suspected in the sick and famished outcast.

After this, she tended a leprous woman. She had heard that in the hospital of San Lazzaro, beyond the Porta Romana, there was a certain Cecca eaten up with the disease, and so disgusting that no one could bear to look at her. In fact, she was to be removed from the city. Catherine insisted on visiting her and caring for her. She may have remembered the lepers that St Francis kissed and Colombini tended, but her chief motive was certainly to force herself into familiarity with what is repulsive to all. The spirit must overcome the body. Joergensen does not consider this act as one of self-conquest, but as natural and spontaneous, and contrasts it with that of St Francis which implied a real victory of the spirit. One must remember, however, that when St Francis kissed the leper he was at the beginning of his ascetic self-conquest, while Catherine was now in her spiritual maturity, and therefore

her acts had less apparent significance. However, even for Catherine, the care of the leper represented a forcing of her own nature which, never wholly tamed, needed constant discipline; we shall have proof of this later on when she was tending her fellow Tertiary Andrea.

Here another victory over herself awaited her. There are physical acts of great merit: stooping in loving care over a rotten stinking body, caring for the soul of a prostitute, eagerly nursing a leper. These are heroic acts requiring self-abnegation, and confidence in the power of the spirit, but they are not out of the ordinary. Rarer is that self-control which is exercised when our hearts are wounded by a subtle insult, or an ironical phrase, or by words full of poisonous intent. Then a wave of indignation sweeps over us, and even if we refrain from crying out against those who insult us, we needs must defend ourselves hotly. Catherine is hailed insultingly by Cecca, whom she has come to nurse: 'Here comes the Queen of Fontebranda, after having been all day in church with the Friars! She never seems to get tired of those Friars!' Catherine may have felt a rebellious impulse or even an instinct of revulsion, immediately checked and banished. The spirit must be conquered, even if this is harder than conquering the body. To be one with Christ, our moral suffering must be purified by total acceptance, total humiliation. So Catherine tended her insulter with redoubled love. Her hands became infected with leprosy—no matter, she must obey and serve. Her mother Lapa objected to her risking her life for a leper, and did not want the danger of infection in the house, but Catherine continued to serve, to bless, to love until the sick woman died and she could compose the poor worn-out body in its coffin, and bury it with her own hands, then disfigured with disease. But after this act of piety her hands returned to their normal health and beauty, becoming even more beautiful than before, as Raimondo da Capua and Bartolomeo Dominici inform us. Catherine's moral sufferings were, however, only at their beginning.

Among so many friends and enthusiastic admirers there were naturally some slanderers and evil tongues. The fact that the maiden stayed so many hours in church, the innocent familiarity with which she treated the Friars—even going so far as to embrace them—her outspokenness and liberality: all this irritated many

folk. She was purity itself—but those who saw her in fervent prayer or in ecstasy, and afterwards engaged in close insistent conversation with some Dominican, did not suspect that she had grave spiritual problems to decide, or needed counsel. She was a woman and young; might she not be in love with one of the Friars? Or, worse still, might she not have yielded to her senses? A commonplace mind cannot think otherwise, and those narrow-minded ‘beghine’, so easily scandalised and prone to gossip, were astonished at Catherine’s singular way of life; and so they whispered disapproval, delicately insinuated some evil, and not content with this, passed on ‘in confidence’ accusations they had heard, so that at last she was arraigned and denounced.

Even among the Friars there were some who disliked Catherine and believed her to be (as we should say today) a hysterical woman; and they were harsh and hostile to her. She felt this and understood, accepting their gibes meekly, glad to be slandered, so that humiliation might better purify her soul and bind her more closely to the eternal. But the malevolent tongues did not cease. When Cecca insulted Catherine she was but repeating what a group of avid, envious, malicious folk went about saying all over Siena, a small city of about thirty or forty thousand inhabitants, in which petty gossip easily became accusation, calumny or scandal.

Among the Tertiaries, Palmerina at once believed these rumours that were circulating, and contributed others, showing open dislike of her fellow Sister, and ordering her out of her house. Catherine was saddened by this. She did not wish to cause trouble to anyone; she was ready to serve her, tend her, help her in any way—but the more humble she was the more Palmerina despised and calumniated her. A struggle took place in Catherine’s heart. At all costs she must win over her enemy’s soul. But why did Palmerina scorn and hate her? Was it perhaps her own fault that she had not been able to arouse love in her companion’s heart? Was it because of her own wretched sins that Palmerina hated her? For when others do evil the fault is ours, because we are so cold or so tepid in doing good. The people we mix with become what we make of them, and if we find no love in them it is because we are ourselves so poor in love. Just as metals cannot resist intense heat, so it is with souls and the soul’s heat. We have

but to increase the living impulse and ardour of our love, and those who hate us will find their hatred turned to love. Catherine felt that a still more radical sacrifice was needed now. Just as she had given all to Christ, and love had triumphed, so now she must give herself entirely to her neighbour, and in that loving dedication she would achieve the total annihilation of self, beyond the limits reached in the cell of Fontebranda. She prayed that the soul of Palmerina might vibrate in harmony with her own. Her fellow Tertiary fell ill and was near to death, but Catherine would not let her die with hatred in her heart. She must be saved from Hell, held back from death. Catherine prayed. The burden of that soul would be upon her if she failed. It was a struggle in the infinite. Catherine imposed her will on God: 'she never ceased praying, and so, as it were, conquered the Unconquerable', says Raimondo da Capua expressively. Because Palmerina disdained, repelled, offended, dishonoured her she gathered all her strength in love and strove to penetrate her adversary's soul. With the piercing eye of love she saw therein, half-concealed under the incrustations of sin, a wondrous and enchanting light, before which she could not remain insensible or inactive. Even if it cost her life itself, she must dissolve the crust of sin so as to reveal the beauty of that soul. She asked for God's help, and received the certain knowledge that Palmerina would be saved; and this in fact came to pass, as the biographers tell us. Catherine's experience was now new and enriched. Until now she had been conquering herself, and doing good to others in obedience to an interior command, but she had not made direct contact with the human soul; now, through suffering, she had discovered the sublime power that is lodged therein. It was therefore imperative to enlarge her sphere of missionary activity, and save from sin as many souls as she could. She had experienced an unprecedented joy in seeing the mysterious light in Palmerina's soul, but every human being had such a light, which, once freed from its dark crust, could unite with others to form an immense arc of light that would return triumphantly to its radiant spring.

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In September 1368 Catherine saved her brothers' lives. The

anonymous author of the *Miracoli* tells us: 'It happened in one year, when there was a revolution in Siena, that Catherine's brothers were contrary to the party that had won and come to power, and their enemies were looking for them to kill them or maltreat them as they did with others. A dear friend of theirs came to their house and said hurriedly: "A band of your enemies is on its way here to do you harm. Come away at once with me and I will place you in safety in the church of Sant' Antonio", which was near at hand, "where others of your friends are sheltering too." At these words Catherine, who was present, arose and said to that friend: "My brothers will not take shelter in Sant' Antonio and I am very sorry for those who are there now". And she sent their friend away with God's blessing. When he had gone she put on her cloak and said to her brothers: "Come with me and do not fear". She took them out with her and they passed right through their enemies' territory, and those of their enemies whom they met on the way bowed low to Catherine, and they all passed through safe and sound. She took them to the hospital of Santa Maria a Siena, and there she handed them over to the Master of the hospital, recommending them to his care, and said to them: "Stay hidden here for three days, and at the end of that time you may come safely home". And so they did. At the end of three days peace had been restored. All those who had taken shelter in the church of Sant' Antonio were killed or taken prisoner. And when the excitement died down, these brothers of Catherine's were fined 100 gold florins, which they paid, and so remained in peace.'

This is not an event which reveals a stage in the spiritual development of Catherine, but it proves how much loved and venerated she was already in Siena, and how lively was her prophetic sense.

As the number of people helped materially or morally by Catherine daily increased, and her fame grew apace, a group of hostile Religious, men and women, abhorred and persecuted her. She was excluded from the meetings of the Third Order, and, to her great grief, forbidden frequent Communion. One Dominican insulted her with vulgar abuse whenever he met her, and once drove her roughly out of church. Another, Pietro di Maestro Landro, pricked her repeatedly with a needle while she was in

ecstasy; a third robbed her of the money she had received in alms. Many people, one of them a woman, vented their rage by kicking her while she was unconscious. They insisted she should leave the church as soon as she had received Communion, which she could not do, because almost immediately she entered into ecstasy. One day during one of her trances in San Domenico, some Friars lifted her bodily and 'flung her out of the church, stiff and unconscious as she was, as if she had been an unclean person; and under the burning midday sun her women companions, weeping, stood shielding her till she came to her senses'.

She suffered from the blows and prickings she received during her ecstasies, but ever patient, sweet and loving, she prayed for her persecutors, and did not cease from her charitable work. As soon as she heard of some wretched woman with an infectious disease she ran to visit her, and if she were without anyone to care for her she looked after her herself. It was thus with a certain Andrea, a Tertiary, suffering from cancer. She was the widow of a certain Antonio, and died on May 23rd, 1371, according to Valli's probable conjecture of her identity. We have three versions of this episode, that of Raimondo da Capua, built up on witnesses' remote memories, that of Bartolomeo Dominici written in his old age, and that of the *Miracoli*, written down shortly after the events described, on October 10th, 1374. This last version is as vivid as a first-hand account, and even if (as often happens with oral accounts) it lacks absolute precision, the author of the *Miracoli* must have listened to a witness who knew all about this story of Andrea, perhaps even from Andrea herself, and the account corresponds to a certain extent with that of Bartolomeo.

It happened as follows. The widow Andrea hated Catherine and 'did all she could to blacken and slander her' with the other Tertiaries, declaring she was not a virgin. This insistent and explicit accusation caused such dismay among the Mantellate that the Prioress, as the Nineteenth Chapter of the Rule commands, called the accused before her to defend herself. Catherine's reply was simple: 'In truth, Mother, I am a virgin. I would rather die than offend my God, and especially in that way of which you accuse me.' Her humility and warmth of conviction were enough to persuade the Prioress of her innocence, and she dismissed her in peace. But Catherine's soul was much distressed by this. For

many days after she searched her conscience to see whether she had committed any trifling fault, or whether in act or word she might have given some cause for such a shameful accusation. She could find nothing. Yet Andrea had defamed her in no hesitant or uncertain manner. How was it possible for the heart of a woman, a Religious, to harbour such a precise, slanderous and baseless accusation? She could understand her enemies' attempts to blacken her, in a general way, as Palmerina had done, and this did not perturb her much because anyone was free to observe her way of life and ascertain its purity; she accepted such detractions as a means of preserving her humility before men; but she could not understand why she should be publicly subjected to this precise and shameful accusation.

The treachery here was evident, and came from a fellow Tertiary. Catherine knew herself to be a great sinner, but what had she done to Andrea except offer her what help she could? She meditated long—on herself, the human heart, evil tongues—and prayed with intense fervour. In these meditations, begun with a sore heart, she gradually found interior calm, realising that accusations, even the most atrocious, are necessary for spiritual progress. Our hearts must be torn asunder for us to understand our own nothingness and the completeness of God. Hatred drives us to seek for shelter under the great wing of Love, and there our soul is purified. In tribulation Catherine grew aware of the justice of her own actions, and this awareness was to become even clearer and inspired her reply, some years later in Florence, to a friend who warned her that she was being slandered. 'This is my glory, this is what I want, to be bitterly assailed in my life. And do not worry about it; let them say what they like. I am sorry for them, not for myself.'

Meanwhile she did not slacken her loving care of old Andrea, who grew steadily worse. When her cancerous tumour burst, the Tertiaries who were nursing her fled, unable to bear the stench of her wound. Catherine stayed by her side, giving her food and drink, and dressing her wound, even when her stomach revolted at the smell, caring for her like a daughter. One day, while attending to her, she noticed 'a new stench, more abominable than any she had ever known before. It was such that she could not endure to finish her dressing of the wound and fled to another

part of the house. She stayed there, deep in thought, and with her conscience reproaching her for having left Andrea in that way. Suddenly she went back to her, and pouring into a glass the wine with which she was to wash the wound, she took a splinter of wood and caught on it some of the stinking pus that flowed from the wound. Adding this to the wine in the glass, she said these words: "So you ran away, Catherine, and abandoned the sick helpless woman, and you abhorred the stench of her wound? Well, I will pay you out now with that stench." And putting the glass to her lips, she drank it all. Then she finished dressing the sick woman's wound and, without feeling any more abhorrence, she tended her as before, or better.'

A complete victory over the body. Today this act fills us with profound repugnance, but if we consider what strength of mind was needed to perform it, we are forced to admire. Catherine, nursing the leper, thought she had reduced her body to total submission and could use it as a docile instrument. Instead, here it was, still sensitive and reluctant; hence the necessity to subdue it with violence.

We are nowadays very far from understanding asceticism; we merge body and spirit in one whole, and are as considerate of one as of the other. It was not so with the great ascetics, for whom the struggle between body and soul was resolved by suppressing the body and, if necessary, mutilating it. Is it not extraordinary that the pus which the Saint drank, and which would have killed the strongest man, had no ill effects on her—indeed left in her a sweet memory, so that years afterwards she declared she had never drunk so delicious a beverage? This miracle of self-conquest and physical immunity could only proceed from the power of Love. Andrea, confronted with such an extraordinary act, was dumb-founded and began to believe she was nursed by a real Saint.

Such a complete victory delighted Catherine, who cheerfully returned to her cell, where she resumed her meditation on the physical sufferings of Christ. Andrea's wound, visible to her eyes, reminded her of her Bridegroom's wounds, which she now saw more vividly—especially the wound in His side. When bending over the tumour in Andrea's bosom, almost touching it with her parted lips, she had imagined she was tending a wound of Christ's; now, in a vision, He showed her His pierced side, and

she felt drawn to kiss it, almost to bury her mouth in it. Did not this wound, ever bleeding for the salvation of men, lead to the heart of Jesus, source of all power and love? Athirst with love, she drank greedily of the fountain, and felt so filled with divine life that her heart seemed likely to burst. At other times she had felt the fullness of love as an unbearable pain in her heart, but never as in this moment. Now her heartbeats were so quickened, so excited, that she could not control them. Perhaps the words of the Psalm came to her mind: 'Create in me, O God, a pure heart'. Then she felt as if her heart were taken out of her breast, and she went on living without a heart. She asserted this ingenuously to her confessor, who laughed at her mockingly. Catherine was non-plussed. She reflected, she meditated. To be sure, one cannot live without a heart. Then another vision came, during which Christ bestowed on her another heart. As this exchange of hearts took place in a vision, inspired by ardent desire, Bartolomeo Dominici does not mention it, and we must consider it as having a symbolical meaning, and as a preparation for her mystical death. We find the same event recorded in the life of St Lutgard, but here also the exchange of hearts is the symbolical fulfilment of desire. Catherine, concentrating her desire in the Psalmist's prayer for a new heart, and thinking at the same time of the Man Christ, brings into being a reality of her own soul, so vivid that she feels Christ piercing her breast, emptying it of her own heart, and then substituting another; her desire and thought are so powerful that they produce an actual scar on her breast. The symbolical event is necessary in the life of mystics, because it is with this and by this that new spiritual experiences are rendered possible.

* * *

From her mystical experiences Catherine derived the energy necessary for her life of charity, and to arouse in whoever approached her a real love for, and serene trust in God. Her manner was always humble, her smile, according to her contemporaries, enchanting, and she was always ready to make the greatest sacrifices for others. Her speech was cordial and clear, coming straight from her impulsive heart, and her own profound conviction communicated itself to her listeners. By her prayers she was

able to work good even in souls that were hostile to her. This happened to Fra Lazzarino da Pisa, the Franciscan philosopher and theologian who had acquired a considerable reputation in Siena as a preacher. Close in his reasoning, and gifted with eloquence, he knew that he deserved the esteem of his colleagues and the admiration of the people. He was ambitious, and wanted to be the only Religious talked of in the city, and when he found that this maiden of Fontebranda was mentioned insistently and very reverently, he was envious, as Bartolomeo Dominici tells us. He tried in vain to slander her in private; he attacked the Dominicans who visited her, perhaps thinking that Catherine was, intellectually and spiritually, a creature of theirs, and that by striking at them he could strike her too. Every time that Franciscans and Dominicans met for their customary theological disputations, Fra Lazzarino attacked the Dominican Lector, Fra Bartolomeo Dominici, trying to discredit him amongst the students as a disciple and admirer of Catherine. But when her fame grew apace he had recourse to preaching against her.

In the Middle Ages sermons played to some extent the part that newspapers play today, and polemics from the pulpit resounded far and wide. If the preacher were learned, his addresses were discussed and admired among ecclesiastics and intellectuals; if he were a Saint, there was a constant stream of conversions, or there arose religious movements, like fresh waves of Christian life; if he were an eloquent or fiery speaker, he incited the crowds, sometimes even to serious or bloody disturbances. Most of the battle against the heretics was waged from the pulpits, whence also the Crusades were preached, rulers were attacked or extolled, and politicians or Religious praised and blamed. The commentary and judgment on the events of the day were pronounced from the pulpits, and thence also proceeded propaganda for war or peace. Public opinion was guided in this way. With the sermons came the message of hate or love, destined to excite the passions or unite men in brotherly love—and the preachers were correspondingly respected and feared.

Fra Lazzarino was well aware of the powerful effect of his sermons, and therefore was sure of waging successful war against Catherine. But his diatribes had no effect and his thunderbolts fell to the ground. Disappointed but undeterred, he decided to visit

this young woman, find out the weak points in her thought and conduct, and so, with new and first-hand information, cleverly elaborated in his own dialectic, he would at last achieve his purpose. He begged Fra Bartolomeo to take him to Catherine's cell, and here is the Dominican's own account of their first encounter: 'Going into the Tertiary's cell, Fra Lazzarino sat down at once on a small chest, and the maiden sat on the floor at his feet; I seated myself a little apart, facing them. They were both silent for a while; at last he began to speak: "I have heard praises of your sanctity, and also that you have received from the Lord the gift of understanding the Scriptures; for this reason I have come to you willingly, in the hope of hearing something that will be edifying for my soul". Catherine replied at once: "I rejoice at your visit, believing that the Lord has sent you to me—you who have the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, with which you daily nourish souls, and I believe that, acting on an impulse of love, you have come to find me to comfort my poor little soul. I pray you therefore, for the love of Jesus Christ, to deign to do so." The time passed in such conversation, and when darkness fell, Fra Lazzarino, without any mockery, such as he had intended, but also without any great esteem for her in his heart, rather considering her as a woman of no great consequence, said: "I see that it is late, and I must go now; but I shall return another time, at a more suitable hour". And he rose to go away. Catherine followed him, and kneeling with her arms crossed on her bosom, begged him to bless her, which he did. After this she asked him to pray for her. Moved more by shame than by devotion, he asked for her prayers in return, and she promised to pray for him very willingly. So Fra Lazzarino went off, thinking that Catherine was at heart a good woman, even if she did not deserve the fame she enjoyed.

During the night, as was his custom, he arose to prepare the lesson he was to read to his students in the morning—when suddenly he was seized by a fit of weeping. What could this mean? Had he perhaps drunk a little more wine than usual during the evening, or had he slept with his head uncovered? These reasons did not convince him. Time went on; the hour for his lesson came, and the tears still streamed from his eyes. He was still lingering when his students came to call him; then he forced him-

self to go with them, but he had to interrupt his lesson almost at once because his weeping would not stop. Going back to his cell, he pondered and pondered, furious with himself, wondering whatever might be the motive of that uncontrollable flow of tears. The following night he slept little, and as soon as he awoke, he began to weep again. Discounting all physical causes, he asked himself whether, perhaps, he had in some way offended God. While he was reflecting, and examining his conscience, he thought he heard a voice saying: "Is your memory so weak that you forget that the day before yesterday you arrogantly scorned My faithful servant, Catherine, and hypocritically begged for her prayers?" This inner voice was a revelation; the irritation and dismay in his soul vanished, giving place to calm and contentment. He stopped weeping and felt an ardent desire to visit Catherine. As soon as the dawn broke he left the monastery in haste and went to knock on the door of her house. She herself opened to him, "aware of what had been stirring in that man's soul, through her Bridegroom's operation". Fra Lazzarino threw himself at her feet, and as she could not bear such an act of humility on his part, she also knelt down, begging him to rise. He refused, but in the end they agreed to rise together. The Friar entered her cell, and they both seated themselves on the straw matting that covered the floor. After a long spiritual colloquy, Fra Lazzarino, with profound peace in his soul, offered himself to her as her disciple, and begged her to consider him as one of her sons, and as such to guide him in the ways of God. And when she replied that the ways of God are laid down in the Scriptures, which he knew much better than she did, he confessed to her that he knew only the outer rind while she knew the fruit. When he insisted that she should accept him as her son in Christ, and form him spiritually, she said to him: "The way of salvation for your soul lies in despising the pomp of the world, and worldly pleasures; clinging no longer to money, and giving up everything superfluous, in nakedness and humility follow Christ Crucified and your Blessed Father Francis".

Lazzarino da Pisa then experienced that spiritual revolution of the Christian religious life in which the things loved and esteemed until yesterday become today the objects of our scorn, and the soul, stripped of all earthly attachments, turns spontaneously to the things of God. Catherine had read deeply in his soul, and dis-

covered its nobility, although obscured by vanity, ambition, and the lust for power and fame. She saw that it could become once more free and beautiful, and therefore, with her prayers and words she had brought him at first disquiet and then serene peace.

Fra Bartolomeo Dominici considers this conversion a replica of that of St Paul. There is certainly a resemblance, but it is slight. After his colloquy with her, Fra Lazzarino gave up his precious books and went to live in the hermitage of Colombaio and San Processo on Monte Amiata—as Fra Angelo Salvetti testifies, in his deposition at the Processo Castellano—and left his cell only to preach. His preaching was now reformed, being no longer based on knowledge learnt in the Schools and in books, but on a living experience, born of contact with love. He had now at his command ‘words as powerful as fiery darts to pierce the hearts of his listeners’. We have no way of knowing whether Fra Lazzarino remained in correspondence with Catherine, or sought her advice, or belonged to her spiritual family. One letter from him to her, and one letter to him from Catherine—all that we have left—tell us nothing of this. His letter is cut in half, from top to bottom, and it is impossible to reconstruct it entirely; Catherine’s letter, dictated towards the end of her life, shows affection, understanding, unity of spirit. A certain wistfulness pervades it all, as with the presentiment of approaching death she turns to the man whom she had initiated and directed into the divine life, and expresses her wish to celebrate Easter with him, that they may enjoy together the abundant goodness of God, and so be better able to know Him hereafter. She exults in Christ, and opens her heart to Fra Lazzarino as to a friend. Gardner, however, does not think that Fra Lazzarino ever belonged to Catherine’s intimate spiritual family, and probably he is right if one understands this family in the strict sense of the group of those who were most often with her, or accompanied her in her journeys, assisted her as secretaries, or directed her as confessors; but if by her family we mean those in whom she confided, and who owed to her much of their spiritual progress, the great enthusiasts of her life and thought, then Fra Lazzarino is to be numbered as not the least of her beloved children.

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Stories of her conversion of Fra Lazzarino da Pisa and of Andrea

di Naddino, her extraordinary care of Cecca, Palmerina and Andrea, and numerous similar deeds, went the round of the city, so that Catherine became more and more renowned. But this meant nothing to her. She did good because it was her duty, but her spirit was turned always to Christ. Trances and visions followed one another. One day she felt as if she were being dissolved by the power of Love, another time a shower of blood and fire fell upon her soul; once she was allowed to contemplate 'a nameless beauty' whose ineffable sweetness enraptured her. When the priest received Holy Communion he seemed to her to enter a blazing furnace, and sometimes a little child came from between the celebrant's hands. She had the impression moreover that her soul passed into God, and God into her, as the fish enters the water and the water enters the fish.

But her longing for real union with Christ gave her no rest; her striving became every day more intense, as she yearned to go out of herself for ever, and lose herself in God. She wanted to die, and in her continual prayers she invoked death without ceasing. She yearned, suffered, waited. Her passion of love was so vehement that she was shaken from head to foot, and left exhausted. She felt she could no longer resist the power of Love, and she began, in fact, to languish, to be consumed by Love. She yearned, she suffered, she believed. She was obliged to take to her bed. Her visions never ceased; her heart overflowed with love, and still more love. She prayed and believed. Finally she felt her heart break, and lost consciousness. When her companions who were tending her saw that her unconsciousness lasted longer than in her customary ecstasies, and they could feel neither the slightest beat of her heart, nor faintest drawing of breath, they were frightened, and ran to call Tommaso della Fonte, who came at once, together with Tommaso da Siena. When the news of Catherine's death spread to the Dominican Priory, Fra Bartolomeo Montucci, with the convert Giovanni da Siena, ran to her cell, then a crowd of the faithful, admirers, protégés, and curious. Fra Bartolomeo Dominici, informed while preaching, interrupted his sermon and hastened to her side. He could hardly press through the throng. Many were weeping and many praying. Was it a swoon, or death? After about four hours of total lifelessness, when doubt was already turning to anguished resignation, the first faint heartbeats were

felt again; they slowly gathered strength until, after several hours, the whole body returned to life. Catherine came out of that state which students of mystical phenomena call the state of suspended faculties, and which culminates in the mystical death. But for her it was a real death. What had she seen or heard? What secrets had been revealed to her? Everyone wanted to know. But for two or three days following she could do nothing but weep and sob. As soon as she could speak she expressed her grief at finding herself once more on earth. Fra Bartolomeo Dominici and Fra Tommaso della Fonte, wishing at all costs to know what she had heard or seen during those four hours of apparent death, pressed her with questions. Catherine replied that her soul had entirely left her body and that she had seen God. 'But is that possible? If St Paul, arriving in the third heaven, did not know whether he was in the body or out of it, how can you say that you know?' Catherine's humility prevent her from arguing with Fra Bartolomeo, and to Fra Tommaso della Fonte, who insisted that she should tell what she had seen or heard, she said simply that she had found herself in the presence of God, who had ordered her to return to earth and enlarge the sphere of her apostolic work. But many years later, speaking to Raimondo da Capua, who had perfect trust in her, she said that besides seeing the glory of the Saints, the torments of the damned, and the pains of Purgatory, she had contemplated the essence of God: 'Take it for certain that my soul contemplated the Divine Essence, and that is why I live with such impatience in the prison of the flesh; if it were not for the love of God and of my fellows, because of which the Lord made me return into my body, I should die of grief'.

This mystical death was another major event in Catherine's life. She had now acquired a certain spiritual immunity—her physical immunity had been revealed when she drank the pus—and she was working among people with increased energy, in obedience to the explicit command of God. She had known the divine world, no longer only in spasms, or through images, or by inner revelations; she had actually left her body to live—a few hours only as men count them, but centuries for her—in immediate contact with God. Returning to earth, she had found it colder and darker than ever. Therefore, her mission was to reveal, as intensely and as widely as possible, the luminous fire that burned in her

breast. One might even say that she felt herself to be part of the fire and of the light—as if she were now made of fiery light alone—of that flame with which Christ illumines those spirits who are willing to accept Him. But to be accepted He must be known, and to make Him known He must be preached. After such a great resurrection Catherine must bear His purifying fire and saving light to all men. This was in the autumn of 1370. Then ‘began men and women to seek her out more than before, and come to her even from far away’. To all she offered her loving service, her sufferings and prayers—and all were kindled by the living and transforming flame of her soul.

Chapter IV

SIENA IN THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

SIENA had no great history, political or military. In the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries she was able to extend her territory wisely, without much bloodshed. Except for some local victories, and her triumphant success at Monteperti, and her defeat of Perugia in her campaign for the conquest of Cortona, she could boast of no great feat of arms. Her Chronicles are certainly full of struggles and battles, but almost all of these were in internal warfare, of no great importance. When she went to war with Florence she always got the worst of it, and as her ally she was always subservient. Siena was never a warlike city, in the strict sense of the word, her only great victory being Monteperti, her only great leader Provenzan Salvani; but she did not know how to exploit her victory, and Provenzan Salvani was defeated and died too soon.

Nor did Siena excel in diplomacy. When the Ghibelline League was formed among the Italian cities, she was incapable of directing it; she paid very dearly for any help she got from the Emperor, and as an ally of the Pope, or of Giovanna of Naples, or of Florence or Milan, she never counted for much. Needing an outlet to the sea, she bought the port of Talamone, of which she had great hopes, but which profited her very little.

It is easy to say that the cause of this restricted external power lay in the instability of her governments, in the sectarian spirit of the parties or 'Monti', in the splitting up of political forces, and so on; but these were immediate and superficial causes and not always decisive. If we trace, for example, the internal political development of Siena, from the middle of the thirteenth century to the end of the fourteenth century, we find six principal governments—not so many, after all, in a century and a half of republi-

can life. Of these, the Twenty-four ruled the city for thirty years, the Thirty-six for ten years, and the Fifteen for eight years. The Nine, who came after, ruled Siena from 1293 to 1355, that is for sixty-three years, and were followed by the Twelve who lasted till 1369, and the Reformers who ruled the republic till 1385. Moreover, if we consider the Constitutions of the city in their various editions and modifications, we find a progressive development. The grave quarrels among the citizens, the numerous revolts and the ferocious hatred between certain families, that sometimes led even the 'Monti' to side with one or the other, and caused serious disturbances to city life—all these might lead one to suppose that the history of Siena shows nothing but anarchical confusion, without any unifying and directing spirit, but this would be to pay too much attention to details and to lose sight of the general political development of the Siennese people. The Statutes surviving today were often modified but never annulled by the parties that followed one another to power, and a clear conception of popular government can be seen in the documents that have remained.

The fact that Siena never dominated Tuscany and played no prominent part in the events of Italy or Europe in the Middle Ages, is due to the somewhat effeminate, sensual character of the Siennese people, incapable of pursuing political designs with tenacity or resolution. The 'Oriental' characteristics of Siennese art, which modern critics like to trace back to Byzantium or Persia, derive for the most part from the Siennese temperament of those centuries: ardent, dreamy, vain, as Dante truly said, refined and voluptuous, and quite incapable of submitting to discipline.

The Siennese were not given to self-sacrifice for the community. They wanted to be great, but not at the cost of too much suffering. In their eyes present enjoyment was worth more than remote conquest, and glory easily won in their own city more precious to them than the hard-won glory of vast enterprises. However, when Siena was in danger and their independence threatened, they struck back as one man, even against the Emperor himself, and showed courage, fortitude and daring; but only perhaps because these occasions called for comparatively brief effort and strain. Unlike the Florentines, they lacked the desire to dominate



St Catherine's vision of Christ, by Bernardino Fungai. Siena, San Domenico. XVth century

others, and therefore did not feel the necessity for the strength that proceeds from union and concord. It was difficult for them to gather together the necessary energy to realise an ideal. We have an example of their inconsistency in what remains of their great Cathedral. If we contemplate those outer arches, worthy to support the roof of heaven, they seem the creation of a race of Titans; if we imagine the present Cathedral as merely the transept of the Cathedral that was planned, and let our fancy dwell on the great aisles that were to be built, we are lost in the immensity of the construction.

But to reduce the immeasurable to harmony, and the colossal to artistic proportions—that is a sublime dream, or the intoxication of pride. Therefore the great ideal was never realised. If the Sieneſe had matched their conception with determination we should have today the great Cathedral of their dream. The Florentines, with their innate ſenſe of harmony, avoided the colossal, and would never have planned a Cathedral of ſuch gigantic proportions—or, if they had done ſo, then they would have completed it, in the teeth of economic bankruptcy, technical difficulties, the plague itſelf. The imaginative Sieneſe lacked their quality of perſeverance.

We find in Siena the ideal of a paternal ſtate, which tries to pacify internal quarrels and provide for the welfare of its citizens and their tranquil proſperity. Perhaps for this reaſon, when the Sieneſe People's Party took over power from the nobles, they never deſtroyed the powerful families of the city or countryside, as did the Florentines, and although they excluded them from the government they did not prevent them from wielding ſome political power through the 'Monte dei Gentiluomini'. Characteriſtic of this paternal ſtate were the continual efforts it made to reconcile hoſtile families, even begging foreign diplomats and biſhops to uſe their good offices in an attempt to effect a laſting peace between the Salimbeni and the Tolomei, or other enemy houſes, for the good of the city as a whole, and to avoid bloodſhed or reſpreſſion.

The Sieneſe wanted proſperity and peace, and when they had both the Chroniclers themſelves recorded the fact with ſatisfaction: 'The city was in great peace and tranquillity, and everyone

attended to his own business, and so they all loved each other like brothers'.

With this peculiar character, half practical, half idealist, now indulging in fantastic dreams, now attempting practical solutions, the Siense showed a strange mixture of self-indulgence and asceticism. Loving pomp but admiring poverty, they amassed enormous wealth, created masterpieces of art, and rose to great religious heights. In the city, while the factions attacked and ousted each other, trade flourished with Africa, Asia and Northern Europe, and through trade the Siense came into contact with Oriental and French civilisations that aroused in them an awareness of their own creative faculties, and set them painting pictures in which, as in their religion, they expressed the genius of their race. Painting and religion are, as it were, the two opposite extremes of the creative world, but in the Siense soul sensuality and other-worldliness could live in harmony. In their paintings rich, fleshy, velvety colours acquired an almost spiritual transparency, while their most ethereal visions appeared in warm colours and striking relief. The painting of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in Siena was profoundly religious, and the Siense mystics at times spoke an almost fleshly language.

During St Catherine's life the glorious period of Siena's history had already gone by. It is certainly not true, as Langton-Douglas asserts, that 'with the fall of the Twenty-four began the period of Siena's decadence', or, as Zdekauer maintained, that the decline of the Commune began in the last twenty years of the thirteenth century. If that were so, we should have its decline before its greatness. The thirty years (1240-1270) of the rule of the Twenty-four were certainly vital years; the city nobles took over the power from the feudal nobility, the people began to take part in the government, the city successfully defended its independence against the Florentines, and triumphed at Monteperti, wealth was accumulated, and the city was enlarged and made more beautiful. This period, however, was one of growth, not of maturity.

The grave defeat of Colle Val d'Elsa, only nine years after the exultant victory of Monteperti, revealed the weakness of Siense Ghibellinism, adopted not in faith but for material advantage. The Twenty-four did not represent the people, and their fall

initiated the people's rise to power. The Thirty-six who followed, a very mediocre government, represented the Guelph party, which accorded well with Siennese interests because it stood for nationalism and popular democracy. But this was a government of transition, like those of the Fifteen, the Eighteen, and the Six. Siena achieved greatness only during the rule of the Nine, which lasted for sixty-three years. Under this government the city enjoyed a long period of prosperity and glory. Painting, which until then had been a reflection of the Byzantine school or a development of French illumination, now became original, and with the work of Duccio, Simone Martini, Lippo Memmi and the Lorenzetti, rivalled that of Florence.

In architecture elegance and strength were mingled, and the numerous public and private palaces gave the city a new look of power and wealth. New churches were built, others restored and embellished. Hospitals were endowed, charity increased, trade was intensified and produced great wealth, while the bankers drew large profits and the countryside prospered. There was great activity in the city and surrounding country. Business flourished for everyone. Between 1309 and 1310 the Constitution was proclaimed. This was at the same time a Statute, a body of laws, and a survey of the public and private life of the citizens. In 1321 was started the 'Studio Generale', or University, which was soon to boast of famous doctors, lawyers and rhetoricians. In 1327, as far as we can judge, was held the first census of the citizens. The Nine maintained the alliance with Florence, which ensured the safety of the State, took up arms against the claims of Duke Carlo of Calabria, and prevented the Duke of Athens from taking possession of Siena; they guarded their frontiers jealously and enlarged their territory, subduing communes and fiefs and purchasing lands and castles. Under their rule Siena acquired more breathing space, and its citizens prospered because the city was rich, wisely administered and ruled, and because within its walls men worked and loved, and created masterpieces of art.

But every state, however fortunate, must decline. Towards 1338 Siena had reached the highest peak of her prosperity. In 1339 she was struck by a famine as well as 'sickness and calamity'; from 1341 to 1345 the bankruptcy of the Florentine bankers involved many Siennese merchants in their fall; in 1345 Siena was

placed under a Papal Interdict. Industries began to languish, trade dwindled, the banks were closed, or barely struggling along. The power of the 'Arti', or Guilds, grew less, and with the worsening of economic conditions, internal political control got slack and foreign political enterprise shrank. The government, consisting of rich merchants, the 'fat' bourgeoisie, was losing wealth and therefore losing support. In 1348 came the plague, a very severe blow for the city and the government. From 1342 onwards the Sienese countryside had been devastated by companies of mercenaries to whom the Republic had to pay 13,324 gold florins, besides expenses of victualling and compensation, which amounted to many more thousands of florins. In this way the leaders lost command of the situation, and the parties in opposition gathered strength. The Nine understood none of the new economic, social and political problems that had arisen. They could have taken into the government representatives of the 'middle bourgeoisie', and by so doing saved themselves; instead, faithful to their Statutes, they kept out of all high office not only the nobles, but all who had University education: doctors, notaries, lawyers, judges—and did not notice that the middle classes were acquiring the same power which had been theirs in 1288 and were now the representatives of the people. They should have prevented the union between the nobles and the 'middle' bourgeoisie, but they did not do so. Every day the people's distrust of the Nine grew, until it became political hatred; and their fear of losing power led the Nine to resort to repressive measures. The Emperor Charles of Luxembourg, on his way through Italy to be crowned in Rome, was receiving money, gifts and acts of submission from the cities that owed allegiance to the Empire. The Nine dispatched Ambassadors to him at Pisa to place the Republic at his disposal, hoping to find in him a defender of their government. The Sienese people disliked this gesture and national feeling was shocked. The Nine were accused of abuse of their power.

Accusations and general hatred of the Nine increased until suddenly the nobles and middle classes, with the intention of ridding themselves of the government, appealed to the Emperor. When on March 23rd, 1355, Charles halted in Siena, the nobles and people hailed him as an ally and pitilessly set about overthrowing the Nine and all their followers.

It was a wretched end for a government under whose rule the city had been wealthy and glorious for more than half a century, and meant the collapse of a Party that had numbered some excellent and hard-working men, and that had ruled generously for the good of all. The 'middle' bourgeoisie was now the strongest party, and set up a government of its own representatives only: the Twelve, Rulers and Administrators of the Republic. The nobles were given certain important charges, but excluded from the government. The Twelve were mostly small traders, without much administrative experience, without lofty ideals or political science, quite unprepared to resolve the grave problems which immediately arose. They suppressed the rebellious cities of Grosseto, Montalcino, Montepulciano and Massa in long and ruinous warfare. They were inept and cowardly when confronted with the ravages made by the numerous Companies of Fortune, preferring to buy these off with hundreds of thousands of florins that the city had to find by means of costly loans. Under their bad administration the economic condition of the Republic grew steadily worse; they did not know how to maintain public order, or rise above petty party interest. Ignorant as they were of economics, nevertheless they could have consolidated their position if they had generously provided for the well-being of the whole city. Their failure was due to their lack of clear ideas and lofty aims, and their use of abject means to attain their ends. They were always more interested in striking down their personal enemies than in working for the good of the state.

Unable to forget party resentments, by the law of August 7th, 1355, they obliged the Siense to hold an armed review every six months to mortify the Nine. Every year they were solemnly to commemorate their glorious victory over them, to humiliate them further. Moreover, the names of the Nine were erased from the public Statutes. The Twelve did not see that their enemies, although defeated politically, and so discredited that for the time being they had no chance of returning to power, nevertheless represented a force which, even if it could not work openly, was succeeding by underground methods in causing them great vexation, conspiring with all their old and new enemies and hampering their action. Ignoring all this, the Twelve went on passing repressive laws. Woe to whoever 'directly or indirectly'

spoke ill of the Twelve; woe to whoever doubted the justice of their actions or grumbled; the punishments were often ferocious. It may be said that at this period one half of the city lived to spy on the other half; hence a sense of malaise all over the city, with rancour and hatred increasing from day to day.

Such conditions were ideal for the rise to power of the lower classes, the 'popolo minuto', or People's Party. The nobles, who had enjoyed some privileges under the Twelve, were now also discontented, because they were excluded from the Supreme Magistracy, and treated with suspicion and distrust by the Rulers. They were determined to get power back into their hands, and when on September 2nd, 1368, the nobles demanded the Palace in order to take over the government themselves, the cowardly Twelve, seeing themselves detested by all, offered no resistance. So, 'without drawing a sword', the nobles returned to power with the intention of reforming the government, and the Twelve, who had lived without honour, died in infamy.

The nobles did indeed reform the government, and admitted three representative of the Nine to a share in their Magistracy of thirteen Consuls. They took over office on the 6th September, but they lasted for only eighteen days, and were overthrown by a combination of opposing forces, the Twelve, the 'popolo minuto', the Salimbeni and the Malatesta.

From this revolt arose the Council of Reformers, consisting of one hundred and twenty-four members, representing the Nine, the Twelve and the 'popolo minuto'. This was the first important political success of the People's Party. In October the Emperor Charles IV, passing through Siena, gave his sanction to the new government. But the 'popolo minuto', rapidly becoming aware of its own strength, decided to take over the whole government. On the 11th of December, with 'great clamour and tumult', and with the aid of the Malatesta, it swept away the Reformers and formed its own Council of one hundred and fifty Reformers, with a Magistracy of fifteen Defenders of the People. To placate hatreds and antipathies, a few days later it gave places in the Magistracy to four followers of the Twelve and three followers of the Nine. This did not please the Twelve, however, who disliked sharing power with their sworn enemies the Nine. The nobles also were rancorous because they were eliminated from

the government, and many of them were exiled. The Salimbeni and Malatesta were as ambitious and avaricious as ever. On the 22nd of December, 1368, the Emperor arrived in Siena on his return from Rome. The Salimbeni and the Twelve then conspired with him to overthrow the Reformers. Siena was very agitated and full of rumours and suspicion. Finally, on the 18th of January, 1369, the Twelve, the Salimbeni and the Imperial troops attacked the Palace and drove out the Nine. This was the first step in their scheme to take over the whole government, and the Reformers and the 'popolo minuto' understood that the insurrection aimed at their own overthrow also. They raised the cry: 'The Emperor wants to conquer Siena for himself and loot it!' and roused the populace against him. The poor Emperor was there almost by chance, and they could easily have bought him off. Their real foes were the Twelve and all the other enemies of the popular party, and against these they had perforce to fight, and win. At this juncture the state identified itself with the People's Party, for patriotic reasons, and for the defence of social and political institutions. The foreigner was supported by the adversaries of the people. It was a political, social and economic struggle. For this reason, as soon as the Reformers clanged the great bell of the city to call the people to arms, the whole populace arose at once, fighting with courage and tenacity—and against them even the well-armed Imperial cavalry, with the forces of the Salimbeni and the Twelve, were of no avail. The people were fighting for their own social victory, and for their liberty, and their enthusiasm increased their strength. They rushed upon the Imperial troops, struck down their standard, defeated them and pursued them in all directions. The Emperor, who was trying to put heart into his cavalry, was at last forced to withdraw, and took refuge in the houses of the Salimbeni, where he was besieged and almost starved. He was obliged to acknowledge in a golden Bull the Council of Reformers of the 'popolo minuto', and in exchange for this 'many horses and other property of his were restored to him', and he was granted a loan of some thousands of gold florins. For an Emperor who was skilled in diplomacy and had made of Bohemia a homogeneous and wealthy nation, this defeat must have been very galling.

Probably he did not understand the new warlike attitude of the Sieneſe people, and their determination—due to their knowledge

that in defending the Reformers they were defending themselves. He had known a Siena of partisans, split in opposing factions, who hated each other bitterly, so that it had been enough to support one of them with arms to ensure its victory. But now things had changed. All the citizens had the right to vote, followers of the 'popolo minuto', of the Twelve, or of the Nine. Every Sienese man could and should go to his own Company and elect, by secret ballot, two or three Reformers. Moreover, those elected must have been Sienese citizens for at least twenty-five years, and this gave a national character to the election. So that the 'popolo minuto' might preserve its own supremacy, the Reformers could only be chosen from the popular party, but they became representatives of the whole city because they were elected by other 'Monti' besides their own.

When the Emperor left Siena, although the People had triumphed and the Nine were acclaimed and honoured, peace and calm were not restored. The Salimbeni and the Twelve hoped to avenge their defeat, and caused the government endless trouble. The Reformers tried to consolidate their rule and at the same time to soften their adversaries' mood with just decrees and laws.

The names of the Twelve and Nine stood for unforgettable divisions, and the very sound of them aroused rancour, hatred and vindictiveness. So these names were abolished, and it was forbidden to cry: 'Death to the People!' 'Death to the Nine!' 'Death to the Twelve!' The nobles were invited to return to the city, and to take some public offices. Rebels and impenitent agitators were severely punished. These indicated excellent intentions on the part of the Reformers, who were for the most part honest men and loyal to the Republic, that they wished to see peaceful, hardworking, wealthy and renowned. They knew when to be severe and when to be benevolent, and were admired for being less partisan than any of the preceding governments. But their generous, just and enlightened conception of government did not conciliate their opponents or establish peace. In August 1370 there was a particularly bloody revolt in the city, which resulted in the Twelve losing their four places in the Magistracy, while their followers were heavily fined and forbidden to bear arms. The population, however, remained very agitated, and riots and street fighting took place continually.

The Reformers did their best to govern the Republic. They stood out against the Salimbeni and the nobles, made wise provisions during the great famine of 1370, survived a dangerous strike in 1371, fought the Twelve, and withstood the plots, conspiracies, disorders, revolts and riots which so often afflicted the city. They also resisted the Companies of Fortune, either energetically in battle, or by cleverly buying their services, or by paying thousands of gold florins to their Captains, to bribe them to leave the territory of the Republic, or not to set foot in it. They made useful treaties and alliance with other cities and states. But in spite of being discreet politicians, able diplomats and honest rulers of Siena, they had not the exceptional qualities needed to calm all grudging personal jealousies and local hatreds; nor were they able to unite all the citizens around the central ideal of the greatness of the Republic. The spirit of faction was kept alive and fomented by the Florentines, so that the Reformers still met with tenacious opposition. So the nobles, the Twelve, the Nine and the Florentines combined against the Reformers, who after the first years of mild rule found themselves faced with such numerous enemies that they had recourse to repressive measures, which were sometimes bloody and cruel. They would condemn to death on mere suspicion, and to imprisonment or torture for a trifling offence. The finances of the city meanwhile deteriorated, the cost of living rose, and the desire for peace became more insistent. So finally the Reformers, after thirteen years of well-intentioned government which had given the city some good social and political laws, were overthrown on March 22nd, 1385, by their own People's Party. This was a bad thing for Siena, says the Chronicler: 'And I who write this, who am not a follower of the Reformers, judged this to be ill done, because in this way much harm and ruin were caused to the city of Siena—for altogether four thousand good artisan citizens were expelled from the city, and not even the sixth part of them ever returned'.

In the midst of such uncertainties, fears, hatreds, struggles and slaughter, one can understand how a woman like Catherine gathered around her a crowd of admirers and disciples, and how in her company men found the charm of peace, while all around was unrest and war.

Chapter V

THE WINNER OF SOULS

WHEN we turn from the history of Siena, compact of revolts, hatreds, terror, violence, conflicts, assassinations and executions, to go back to Catherine's cell, it is like leaving the noise and whirl of a vast city to enter a cloister. We seem to cross the threshold of a mysterious realm of silence and peace. The trim lawns, so freshly green, the few rose trees that often bear but one solitary rose each, of dreamlike colour and form, the harmony of the arches, whose columns stand out like silver Byzantine arabesques against the green and gold background, the huge grey and russet pile of the church beyond the cloister, and above it, the bell-tower that soars as if built of sighs, prayers and light—all this makes us forget our work and worry for the things of this world, and even forget also the passing of time and the anguish of the spirit.

— Catherine's ennobling words had the same fascination for men as the thought of health for the sick man, of freedom for the captive; both the inner cell of her spirit and the outer cell of her room offered the weary in soul and body an oasis of peace. In the commotions of the life of her city she was not an arbitrator, as some writers, far from understanding her soul, would have us believe; she was the friend of God, and sought no contact with politics or politicians. If the politics of the Republic had exercised any attraction over her, what better chance could she have found to make her voice heard than in the years between 1368 and 1372, years of continual revolts, unrest, and civil strife? She might have recalled the citizens and governments to a closer observance of Christian precepts; she might have denounced the deceits, falsehoods, treacheries and innumerable political crimes that were perpetrated before her eyes every day, and that must have shocked her deeply. If she had been a woman inclined to political life, as

she has often been represented, she would in those years have made known her views as to how the Republic should be ruled, and have prescribed the remedies she thought necessary for the numerous ills that afflicted the city. She did not do so, because she felt no inclination for political life, knowing only one sort of life, that of Christ. Absorbed in Him, she was entirely preoccupied with saving individual souls. She may have thought, perhaps, that by converting the citizens she might in this way succeed in setting up a government of love. Probably she distinguished sharply between the two cities, the city of God and the city of this world, and took no interest in the latter—for she was only concerned with the city of God, as we see in the letter she sent to Madonna Mitarella* wife of the Senator Vico da Mogliano, on the occasion of a revolt that took place about the middle of the year 1373, against the application of a sentence pronounced by the Senator.

In 1368 and 1369, as the early biographers tell us, she was entirely taken up with her loving care for the sick in mind and body, alleviating their distress and distributing food and clothing. In 1370 she began her work among the greatest sinners, and we hear of spectacular conversions. Most of these can be placed, approximately, between 1370 and 1374. The series opened with the sudden death-bed conversion of Andrea di Naddino de' Bellanti, who belonged to the party of the Nine, 'rich in family and temporal substance, but poor in virtue—in fact, a gambler, blasphemer of God and the Saints, obstinate in sin and in wishing to die unshriven. Salvestro de' Manzii, in the *Annali di Siena*, calls him 'a rare rascal'. Catherine was asked to pray for him, and did so with such fervour that Andrea was converted, and, on the 16th of December, 1370, died a Christian death.

Then we have the conversion of various members of the Tolomei family, most surprising of all the sudden conversion of Giacomo Tolomei, 'a strange and very terrible man'. When he heard that his sister Ghinoccia had become a Tertiary through Catherine's influence, he 'came back to the city in a great fury, cursing not only the Sisters but the Friars also, and threatening to tear the habit from his sister's back'. Informed of this by Rabe, the mother of the Tolomei, Catherine at once sent Fra Tommaso

*Letter XII. Dupré-Thesider, ed.

della Fonte to speak with Giacomo. The somewhat timid Fra Tommaso took with him Bartolomeo Dominici. It was not a cordial encounter and soon became an unpleasant dispute. Fra Tommaso had lost all hope of succeeding in his intent when Fra Bartolomeo came to his help. The conversation at once began to take another turn, and Giacomo gradually calmed down, and at last consented to give way, and to go to confession. The two Dominicans were astounded. What had taken place in his soul? Later on they learnt that Catherine, in an ecstasy, had been praying to God for him all the time they were talking, and that her prayer had been powerful enough to touch his heart, and so to 'make the wolf a lamb, and the lion a puppy'.

Catherine's little group of companions, which already included the Tertiary Francesca Tolomei, was now joined by her sister Ghinoccia; the youngest brother, Matteo, became a Dominican. So a branch of one of the great families of Siena was completely won over to Catherine's cause.

About this time occurred the conversion of two malefactors. They were being drawn to execution on a cart, and on the way the hangmen were torturing them with hot pincers. Catherine was at the house of the Saracini, and her fellow Tertiary, Alessa Saracini, told her that under the windows of the house was passing a cart bearing two criminals, who were horribly blaspheming against God and the Saints, while their torturers burnt their flesh with red-hot pincers. Catherine came forward 'to the middle of the room, and hearing and understanding their desperate cries, at once went into an inner room and cast herself on her knees before a picture of Our Lady, praying: "You who are appointed advocate for sinners, intercede now for these, and, if you will, lay all their torment upon me". When the cart arrived at the place of execution, Christ appeared to the two evildoers, and at once their cursing and defiance ceased. They made their confessions, and then fell to praising God and "in a loud voice accused themselves, saying they had deserved this punishment and a much worse fate too"; so, devout and contrite, they were both hanged.'

As Catherine's fame and authority grew, so other Mantellate came to live with her: Caterina de'Ghetto, Caterina dell'Ospedaluccio, Monna Raniera, Giovanna di Capo, Agnola di

Vannino and others. These were as faithful as her earlier followers, and assisted her day and night, sometimes acting as her secretaries, accompanying her on her journeys, or receiving her visitors when she was in ecstasy, or away. Unlike the first companions of St Francis, they were not endowed with any great intellectual gifts, nor were they noteworthy in character. None of them stands out distinctly from the others, we know nothing of their spiritual traits, and if any of them wrote any Memoirs of Catherine, none of these, so far, has come to light. They were good, worthy women, following Catherine about as if fascinated by her, asking her to guide and support them in the difficult way of spiritual perfection. She was their teacher and their mother too.

They had no Rule, beyond that of the Third Order of St Dominic, to regulate their daily life, and they were only held together by Christian love and their admiration for the Saint. They passed together many hours of the day, ate and prayed together, but without a fixed timetable, remaining a small free congregation, whose life depended on the religious ardour that Catherine imparted to them all.

The Saint was glad to be with these Sisters, and interested herself in their spiritual life and in their external activity—but their company could not suffice for her. Her charity was all-embracing and she felt an urgent need to extend her range of action; she wanted to learn from those who knew more than she did, and could teach her.

Her cell, besides being a place of prayer and ecstasy, gradually became a centre for theological and ecclesiastical conversations, and even for Papal politics, which for her meant Christian politics. Her visitors became more and more numerous, and often had fresh news and information to impart; they reported current events, speculated on the future of Siena and its territory, or on that of the Florentine Republic, the Papacy, the Visconti, or the Companies of Fortune. When not rapt in ecstasy or prayer, she listened eagerly to the arguments of the learned Religious who came to her cell, begged for explanations, tried to understand and make her own the thoughts of St Thomas that the Dominicans expounded to her, and did not fail to reconcile them with Augustinian and Franciscan conceptions, so that her intellectualism was coloured with Franciscan feeling, as we see in the 'Dialogue' and her letters.

In her cell she heard talk about the Pope's return to Rome, and then of his departure once more for Avignon, about the possibility and necessity of new Crusades against the infidels, or the urgency of a moral reform of the clergy. So the first seeds of ideas, that were to be so fruitful later on in her life, were probably sown in her mind during some of these general conversations, or commentaries on recent events. It has been asked how it was that Catherine got her ideas of the Crusades, to which the reply has been given that she 'must have known that Gregory XI was a fervent promoter of the Crusades', and that she was influenced by the thought of Raimondo da Capua.[†] This is true, but most probably Catherine was thinking about the Crusades and following their fortunes even before the pontificate of Gregory XI. She was always in close touch with the Dominicans, who were most enthusiastic supporters of the Crusades, and in the pulpit or in private always boasted of the Crusaders' exploits and preached the necessity for the campaign. Moreover, in June 1368, when Catherine had already begun her social activity, there arrived in Siena Pietro the First, King of Cyprus, with three hundred knights, all guests of the Friars of San Domenico in Camporegio, 'and there were many fine people, and the most honourable Prince, with the best horse, and the most wonderful possessions, that ever entered Siena'. He stayed some days in the city and distributed gifts to those who went to visit him.

Pietro the First was tall, with blue eyes and brown skin and hair. He was of majestic appearance and bearing. His knights in their sumptuous garments accompanied him everywhere. He was admired by all who saw him. There is no contemporary Chronicler of any city where he stayed, were it only for a few hours, but sings his praises. When Pietro came to Siena he already enjoyed an extraordinary fame. Urban V had praised him warmly, he had been victorious in battle, all Europe considered him as great a Crusader champion as Godfrey of Boulogne, and he was called the defender of Christianity in the East. No one yet knew that in Rome the Pope, busied with more immediate and more pressing problems, had refused him the help he had hoped for. In Siena Pietro was the illustrious champion of Christendom, who had won glory

[†] Dupré-Thesicider: '*Cronologia delle Lettere Politiche di Caterina e la Critica Moderna*' *Studii Cateriniani* I, 1924, No. 3, pp. 123-4.

warring against the Mahomedans, admired by all, beloved by the Church, and specially by the Dominicans. The Preachers of Camporegio must have been proud to receive him as their guest.

In Siena, as everywhere else, the king certainly spoke in favour of a new Crusade against the infidels, and with his eloquence aroused enthusiasm among the Dominicans and other faithful for the 'santo passaggio', or holy expedition. Catherine, who spent several hours a day in the church of San Domenico, and was in continual contact with the Dominican Fathers, must have heard about the glorious exploits of the King of Cyprus and his plans for the defence of Christendom. We have no document to prove or disprove this, but in all probability King Pietro's visit to Siena brought the whole conception of the Crusade more vividly into Catherine's mind.

Now that the longed-for champion had arrived, a guest of her own city, she was strengthened in her belief that to take part in the Crusades was the bounden duty of all Christians. During this period also she must have heard a great deal of talk about Urban V. When William of Grimoard was elected Pope in 1362, a fresh confidence in the Papacy was aroused throughout Europe. After half a century of decadence the glorious days of Boniface VIII, of Innocent III and Gregory VII seemed about to return. Urban V was a man of strong character, of clear and precise ideas; '*modo habemus papam*' had exclaimed Talleyrand de Périgord at his election, an election greeted enthusiastically by all, including the poet Petrarch.

A hardy Benedictine, he was learned, swift to plan and prompt to act. No one could deter him from undertaking what he had in mind to do for the good of the Church. He considered his duty as a Christian and as Pope to be sacred, and would have courted death rather than neglect it. Moral standards at the Papal Court and among the clergy were low: they must be corrected and reformed. European politics were slipping away from the control and authority of the Church: the power of the Papacy must be re-established over kings and political leaders. He was a reformer; he obliged the high dignitaries of the Church to give up abusing their power; he opposed their simony, pomp and avarice, usury and worldliness; he punished immorality among the clergy; he forced the bishops to reside in their dioceses; forbade plurality of benefices; demanded the restoration of illicit gains; protected

studies; rebuilt churches and convents; did all he could to promote virtue among the clergy.

Politically, by means of Cardinal Alborno, he strengthened the temporal power of Italy, curbed the extending might of Bernabò Visconti, tried to re-establish a European equilibrium, preached with great fervour the Crusade against the infidels, and returned to Rome as the natural seat of the Papacy.

These were intentions and deeds that aroused the admiration and confidence of his contemporaries. Today, when we consider the results achieved by Urban V, we find them very slight. It is true that he brought about a higher standard of morality in the Curia and in the dioceses, but at his death the way of life in ecclesiastical circles was very much the same as before his election; the Crusades failed, and he himself, towards the end of his life, supported them but feebly; he had poor success in his efforts towards European peace; when Alborno died the Papal States revolted, and he was unable to suppress them; he tried to get rid of the scourge of the French mercenary bands by sending them to fight in the Holy Land, but failed in this also; he forced the Cardinals to obey him, but without their full consent; after three years of residence in Italy, the greater part of the time not in Rome but in Viterbo and Montefiascone, he returned to Avignon. He did not succeed in his principal aims, and this may be due to his own insufficient sanctity, which was never of the sort to arouse consciences and sway peoples; moreover, his policy could not succeed because it was dictated by human wisdom, grafted, it is true, on Christian principles, but with these latter too carefully weighed and measured; his plans failed because he lacked the constancy to press through to the end with every single undertaking, and because he was too apprehensive for himself and for the Church. Nevertheless, his political experiments and his moral reforms served to prepare the ground for the future, and his insistence on the Papacy's return to Rome was particularly effective, even if this return, in his case, lasted only for a few years. It was a triumphal return, longed for and welcomed in Italy with hymns of joy, such as Petrarch's 'Epistole'. All the Italian states congratulated Urban V, and Siena sent her representatives, with many other of her citizens, to welcome him at the port of Talamone, with gifts of wax and confectionery.

Among the Religious of Siena the chief topic of the day in 1367 was the meeting of Colombini with the Pope when he disembarked at Corneto on the 3rd of June. In that year Catherine was leading a very secluded life, but the echo of this event may have reached her through the Dominicans, or she may have learnt of it later from the nuns of Santa Bonda with whom she was on friendly terms. Giovanni Colombini had written some epistles to these nuns, describing what had happened.

The Pope, surrounded by his imposing and luxurious court, had deigned to notice Giovanni and his band of sixty ragged and filthy companions, and so they gratefully sang the praises of their spiritual Father. One wonders whether Urban felt in these Poverelli a saintly purity and an enthusiasm worthy of Heaven. Colombini himself says: 'And then as the hour of his coming approached we went to the sea shore, where great preparations were being made to receive the Holy Father and the Cardinals, and by God's grace, to the best of our power we worked and helped to prepare the Holy Father's room, and we got ready his bed, and the beds for the Cardinals, and we received many thanks for this. Then, when the Holy Father came, we stood on the bridge or at the side, where almost everyone was embraced. Then we saw him come, and with him seven Cardinals, and it was the most beautiful devout thing ever seen. And we saw him stepping out of the ship, looking really holy. We all had olive branches round our heads and in our hands, and we cried out all the time: "Christ be praised, and long live the Holy Father!" and we were singing his praises and rejoicing, and by the grace of God room was made for us everywhere; all thanks and all glory to the supreme God! And mark you, all the princes of the world were there, and with such devotion that it was a wonderful thing to see. Francesco and I, and Giovanni di Piero kissed his feet, as did likewise other Poverelli, and two of them helped to support his canopy, that was held over his head. Then when he got to land he rode in the midst of festive rejoicings to the Brothers of St Francis; we, bearing our olive branches, kept as near to him as we could, and when he was told about us, he said he wished to see us and to help us. But such was the press of foreigners and ambassadors and other nobles about him that this was not possible.'

The recognition of the Poverelli's orthodoxy, the help they

received from the Pope, and their kind reception at the hands of the Cardinals and prelates, filled Colombini and his followers with joy, and the nuns of Santa Bonda, with the many friends and admirers they had in Siena, shared in their joy.

If Catherine knew of Urban's visit to Italy she must also have known about his intentions and his achievement. From the pulpits and in conversations the Dominicans certainly expounded and commented on the Pope's various Bulls in favour of the 'Holy Expedition'. The reform of the clergy also was pleasing to the Dominicans, who had worked hard to that end; and the Pope's plans for European peace, which met with the approval of all peoples, must have found perfect comprehension in Catherine's heart. From that time on she adopted as her own message the preaching of the Crusades, the promotion of peace in Europe, and the reform of the clergy. Her own personal observations, and what she herself had suffered at the hands of several wicked Friars and nuns, besides what she heard reported in the city, must have convinced her that amongst the clergy it was necessary to extirpate covetousness, envy, vanity, malice, the love of soft living and high office, sensuality, jealousy, violence, uncharitableness, and the neglect of their religious duties, and to form a body of exemplary priests and friars who should tend the poor and the afflicted, be spiritually united to God, and live for the good of their fellows. She approved of all Urban's work, and shared the enthusiasm of the Religious for his return to Rome. Everyone rejoiced when the Emperor passed through Siena in 1368 on his way to the Eternal City, and re-entered Siena on October 21st, holding the bridle of Urban's horse, and later, on the Feast of All Saints, served the Papal Mass on the occasion of the crowning of the Empress. But on September 5th, 1370, it was learnt that the Pope had embarked at Corneto and set sail for Provence. On the 10th of December of the same year Urban died at Avignon. As soon as the news reached Italy the people said it was God's punishment, without reflecting that the Pope, who was very ill, would have died as soon in Rome as anywhere else. The prophecy of Brigid of Sweden was at once believed. She had urged the Pope not to leave Italy, and had sent him a written description of the awful vision she had had concerning him. Generally speaking, prophecies are exact *post rem*; that is, in later events we see only those facts,

very often fortuitous, that correspond more or less to the terms of the prophecy; in this case, however, there were precise indications *ante rem* which were indeed remarkable.

The Blessed Virgin had appeared in a vision to Brigid and had told her that Pope Urban had returned to Rome, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and that she, the Blessed Virgin, had watched over him during the long voyage from Avignon, shielding him from all harm. She went on to say that she was surprised at the way in which the Pope was now behaving towards her. 'He does not look at me; he turns his back on me, and is forsaking me to go where the wiles of the devil lead him, and the counsels of his worldly friends, who care more for their own pleasure and their own will than for God's will and the salvation of souls. But if he insists on returning at all costs to the land where he was elected Pope, soon after he arrives there he will receive such a blow and buffet that his teeth will chatter. . . .' She added that after death, on the day of judgment, he would have to render an account to God not only of what he had done as Pope, but of what he had omitted to do.

One can understand that in an age when prophecies were much believed in, the death of Urban V, coming little more than three months after embarking at Corneto, left people thunderstruck. The popularity enjoyed by St Brigid contributed to spread the belief that Urban had been punished by God. How was it that Urban, who knew St Brigid's virtue, her selflessness and holiness, and the truthfulness of some of her earlier predictions, had paid no heed to the grave prophecy that concerned himself?

He may have considered the prophetess to be somewhat ingenuous, as all prophets are, and perhaps he listened with rather ironical patience to the long account she had given him one day of a vision she had had of the ills of the Church and the remedies necessary—all described in a sententious and highly pictorial style—although he must have known that the facts were true and the remedies needful. The Church was certainly corrupt in the laity, clergy and Papal court; Urban had known that for a long time, and the knowledge had pained him. He had done all he could to bring about reforms, but the evils were still great, and it was therefore necessary to bring the Church back to evangelical purity and poverty: a hard, almost impossible task, given the nature of man.

Genuine religious reforms spring from men's innermost souls, and are not imposed from without. In those years most of the clergy and laity felt no inner urge to purify themselves; hence the impossibility of a thorough and general reform. But as far as his own efforts went Urban had been an example of priestly virtue since he became Pope, and to the best of his powers had compelled Cardinals, bishops and abbots to lead a less worldly life. What more could he have done? He would willingly have transformed the Papal court into a cloister, but who would have stayed with him there, except a few ascetics and Saints, who were already leading a strict and pure life? In all probability, by so doing and by disregarding the political and diplomatic role exercised by the Papacy in the world, he would have weakened its moderating influence, and diminished or destroyed the power of the Papal State. A Pope of the Middle Ages, even if a monk and a reformer, could hardly conceive of Christendom without some temporal power for the Holy See. Although he considered Brigid of Sweden's immediate and drastic remedies impracticable, Urban admired her greatly, recognised the holiness of her life, and had so much faith in her visions that, shortly before he left Italy, he sent his own confessor to her to ask for a revelation of God's will with regard to the Church. It is therefore surprising that he chose to ignore the Saint's dreadful prophetic threat, as well as the entreaties of friends like Petrarch, and saintly bishops such as Alfonso di Valdaterra.

If we study the motives that led Urban to return to Avignon we find ourselves agreeing with those who consider he was fully aware of his own grave illness and, knowing his end to be near, desired that the new Conclave should be held in a land where, as he thought, there was more freedom than in Rome. He gave no thought to himself and was persuaded neither by the French Cardinals nor by any other personal reason. During his sojourn in Italy he had come to believe that a free Papal election could not be held in Rome, and it was for the sake of the Church of the future that he paid no heed to counsels, appeals, tears or threats.

In our day we can see that if Urban V had stayed in Rome the schism that broke out eight years later with Urban VI would have occurred during the pontificate of his own successor—with perhaps even direr consequences, but in the Italy of 1370 no one

could realise this. It was thought, instead, that Urban, old and sick, was a weakling in the power of the French Cardinals. He was called by some a sentimentalist, who could not live far away from his own country, and some even declared him a traitor.

What Catherine thought we do not know, nor how she judged him. Probably she refrained from any judgment, as she would have thought it sinful to think ill of the Vicar of Christ. In fact, between 1373 and 1374 she was writing to Bernabò Visconti: 'Even if the Vicar of Christ were a devil incarnate, I must not raise my head against him, but always humble myself'.

If she refused to judge the Pope because he was the Vicar of Christ, all the more would she have refrained from pronouncing judgment on Urban V, whom she must greatly have admired for his moral reforms, and for his advocacy of the Crusades. We get a glimpse of her admiration for him in a letter she wrote to Gregory XI in 1376, urging him to follow the example of his predecessor who, when he was in doubt about anything, consulted his Cardinals, but when his mind was made up 'he paid no heed to their counsels, but followed his own, and cared not that they were all against him'.

No document reveals her thoughts about Urban's departure from Italy. She must have grieved over it, and probably at this time there began to form in her mind the definite idea that it was the Pope's duty to reside in Rome. This was not the right moment for her to seek a solution of this problem; other cares were pressing upon her. Her days were full; in the cause of God not a minute could be wasted. She was in ecstasy, wafted to the Heavens, seeing wondrous creatures, hearing the music of angels, rejoicing in the infinitudes of the divine spirit, or praying with irresistible fervour for the welfare of her friends or the salvation of sinners; or she was succouring the unfortunate, gathering in her cell old and new acquaintances, reading their hearts with wonderful insight, counselling and admonishing, soothing passions, reconciling hostile families, working in their souls through the love of God. Her sphere of action spread further every day; her fame travelled beyond Siena and its province, and soon reached Rome, Florence, Milan and Avignon, diffused chiefly by the Dominicans. Enriched with ever-new experiences, she formed a still clearer conception of the great misery of mankind, and the immense social signifi-

cance of the Christian message. The ardour which she drew from continual contact with the divine was transfused into whoever approached her; she had her own standards of judgment; hardly anyone could resist her smile, and those who entered her cell 'attracted by her very sweet words', could not tear themselves away from her. She was always ready to make any sacrifice, took no rest in her service for others, and faced with fortitude whatever difficulties or sufferings her apostolate brought her.

In these years, perhaps in 1372 or 1373, the Dominican Fra Simone da Cortona became her favourite 'little son'. Fra Simone was as shy as a young girl, and very easily hurt. His heart overflowed with love, and he was given to violent outbursts, which he managed to control because he was ashamed to let them be seen. When there were other Friars in Catherine's cell, who were obviously quite at home there, he would not go inside, but stayed dumbly without, grieving at not being able to hear his 'mother's' inspiring words. He wanted to listen to her 'fiery speech' alone, lost in blissful contemplation of his saint, far from prying glances, and to open to her his very sensitive heart, always thirsting for affectionate and encouraging words. Catherine at once guessed his silent devotion, his honesty, his touchiness, and the twinges of jealousy which tormented him; she guided him into spiritual paths with exquisite tact. 'Bless my little son, Fra Simone; tell him to open the mouth of his desire to receive the milk that his Mother will send him', she asks someone to tell him; or 'Tell Fra Simone that I shall take the cord of love, and bind him to my bosom like a mother and her little son'; and again: 'Tell Fra Simone, my little son in Jesus Christ, that the son is never afraid to go to his mother, but runs to her, especially when he is hurt, and his mother takes him in her arms and lifts him up to her breast and feeds him; even a bad mother will always lift him up to the breast of love.'

These words and counsels must have filled him with emotion, as on those occasions when Catherine showed special kindness to him. One day when he was sick and feverish he went with Fra Tommaso della Fonte to see the Saint, who was at table with the other Tertiaries. Fra Tommaso cheerfully and naturally at once seated himself at table, but Simone stayed 'further away, a little apart', afraid of having come at the wrong time, and of being

unwanted. Catherine then called him, and when he hastened joyfully forward she made him sit down beside her and began to feed him as if he were a child—one spoonful for him, and the next for her. The distaste for food, which he had felt before, vanished as if by magic. Catherine then embraced him and made the sign of the Cross over him; his fever and sickness left him at once. The shy, timid, touchy Simone had a very tender heart; he never ceased singing her praises, and as an old man, many years after her death, still showed a fresh, ingenuous admiration for his 'little Mother'.

About this time Neri di Landoccio Pagliaresi also became a 'caterinato'. One cannot state exactly when he first met Catherine, but we believe it was at the beginning of 1372, and that it was shortly afterwards that he wrote to her asking her to receive him as a son. She replied: 'You asked me whether I would receive you as a son; I, miserable, unworthy and wretched as I am, have already received you, and receive you now with fond love, and I bind myself and shall bind myself always before God to be answerable for you, for any sin you have committed or might yet commit. But I beg you to fulfil my desire, that is, to follow Christ Crucified, withdrawing yourself completely from intercourse with the world, as I have said before. In no other way can we follow Christ.' Neri became her disciple, son, travelling companion and fond faithful secretary. He belonged to a distinguished family; he was a member of the general council for St Martin's ward in 1371 and in 1375, and received offices and commissions from the Commune. He was also a poet. Before he met Catherine he was much admired by his friends, 'because he was very virtuous and pleasing, and an excellent writer of fine poems', and after joining her circle he was much loved and admired by her followers. He was of a melancholy character, often discontented and full of doubts. The two poems of his we still have cannot give us an idea of his creative talent. His sensitive soul loved the poetry of Dante, and he tried to imitate its verse, but without showing any touches of personal genius.

Catherine understood his troubled soul and the delicacy of his feelings; she succeeded in drawing him out of the despondency into which he often fell, and in teaching him self-conquest. Whether near or far, she sustained him with her prayer, and her

affectionate advice was always an encouragement to him to persevere. He thought of her as his necessary support, and confided everything to her, because he felt that she gave him the strength to continue to live, both materially and spiritually. When he feared that God would not forgive him his sins, and gave way to momentary despair, she showed him the absurdity of such a fear and prevented it from becoming a conviction. When she died he felt as if he were abandoned in a wilderness, and bewailed:

‘Tell me, who will save me now from an evil end?

Who will preserve me from delusions?

Who will guide me when I try to climb?

Who will console me now in my distress?

Who will ask me now: “Are you not well?”

Who will persuade me that I shall not be damned?’

After 1370 Catherine’s apostolate took on a new form of expression, in her letters. Those words of hers, so full of urgency that they converted sinners and dragged them penitent before God, imploring Him to grant them purity of life, those joyful words that extolled the glory of Christ, and others, full of delicate understanding, that stole their way into people’s souls; words as ethereal as an evening sky, that bids farewell to all things earthly; strong, positive, determined, convincing words, like the voices of nature—these were to be fixed for all time. We do not know how or when she felt the need to write letters. Those that survive today are only a fraction of the numberless epistles she wrote, so that those we consider to be her first, in order of time, may well be later than many others, now lost.

In his excellent re-arrangement of Catherine’s ‘*Epistolarium*’, Dupré-Theseider rightly places as two of the early letters one written to the nuns of Santa Marta, and the other to Monna Agnese Malavolti and the Sienese Tertiaries. Perhaps he dates the former a little too early, ascribing it to 1367. In that year, or at least until towards the end of it, Catherine was busied almost exclusively with her own spiritual development, and could hardly have felt herself sufficiently authoritative to give advice to an Abbess. Moreover, every action of hers was controlled and approved by Fra Tommaso della Fonte, and it is hardly likely that he would have allowed her to despatch a letter written in the style of a spiritual teacher. In 1367 Catherine was known as a

contemplative or ascetic, but about the significance of her spiritual life even Fra Tommaso was still perplexed. He could hardly have let pass phrases like these: 'Now I command you and compel you to show that you desire to have this knife in you'—that is, the knife of hate or love, or: 'I want you not to desire time according to your own will, but according to the will of Him who is'. These phrases imply, in their author, an authority that Catherine had not yet assumed; she was to acquire it a few years later, after her mystical death in 1370. It may therefore be supposed that her correspondence began about that year.

Letter-writing considerably extended Catherine's range of action; her letters were sincere, direct, full of truth and the spirit of justice, sometimes seeming almost to sweat blood, at other times glowing with ardour, always full of an infinite love of Christ. They had great power to move souls and to impart their own fervour to others, so that she became known not only in Siena and the province, but farther and ever farther afield, to all sorts of people. Her spiritual directors realised that letters so burning with love must promote the good of the Church, and so they encouraged their diffusion.

Her own spiritual condition is expressed in the letters she wrote before going to Florence. We must know ourselves, she says, before we may know anything else. In our innermost soul there is an empty cave, image of the nothingness of man; she reminds us that we are 'utter falsehood', and so creators 'of what is not'; but by the side of this negation of being is the positive manifestation of truth: 'supreme, eternal, and primal truth', which is a peaceful sea, from whose depths are born all those things that *are*. Even sin? Sin (here she is Augustinian) is not-being, and therefore belongs to our nothingness; it is the 'utter falsehood' already spoken of; therefore it is we who generate sin, and are alone responsible for it. But if we are nothing in ourselves, our being, in so far as we have any being, comes from an Other—and who is this Other but God? 'We know that we do not exist of ourselves; since we do not exist, we see that our being is from God.' The discovery that our being comes from God implies a close relation between ourselves and God; in other words, the Creation. In fact, God created us by an act of love towards Himself and towards us: God 'contemplated Himself, and was filled with such measure-

less love that out of this love He created us'. God's falling in love with us in Himself was the creative impulse, and this love for us has lasted, lasts, and will last for ever. But, because of the freedom granted to us from our creation, with Adam came imperfection. God's desire that the creature should love his Creator as the Creator loved His creature was not fulfilled. 'The first man fell from the height of grace through self-love.' The fall meant degradation, loss of human dignity, slavery.

But God's love for what He had created, as a concrete reality outside Himself, did not cease, and He determined to win men once more to Himself; hence the source of salvation for mankind: the appearance of the Saviour. 'God was constrained by the flame of divine charity to send the sweet incarnate Word of His own Son, to redeem Man and draw him out of his slavery': an act of love that lifts us above ourselves, and gives us understanding of ourselves, so that we become afire with love, and one with Christ, sharers in His divinity. 'Love, sweet love, refresh our memory to receive and remember God's goodness to us, and to understand it; for when we understand we love, and when we love we find ourselves united and transformed in the love of the source of all love, passing even through the gate of Christ Crucified.'

We learn all this through self-knowledge; should we not therefore remain always in the cell of our own soul? This cell may be thought of also as a deep well, for it contains water and earth: earth because we acquire the knowledge of our own worthlessness, water because we drink deeply of the will of God. Let us then enter into the depths of this well, for it must be that abiding therein we shall know ourselves and know the goodness of God.

This conception has its practical consequences, for when sin has, as far as that is possible, been eliminated from the world, everything that remains will be good, perfect, and therefore worthy to be loved—a vast field for our love which will never be exhausted, because as 'charity cannot be bound by law or measure', so the object of charity becomes a sharer in Him who is above all laws, and perfect. But to reach this fullness of vision, which before Adam fell was freely given, today we must lose and drown ourselves in God: 'ever gazing at the sweet eyes of His love'.

Thus love creates love; every time we contemplate our Creator we implore His love, and at the same time we rise above our own nothingness; and when we lose ourselves in God, it is clear that we wish to enter into, and become, love. Thus is made possible the progressive conquest of perfection, and the intimate understanding of ourselves, of our fellows, of God. 'I tell you that if a man does not arise, and open his eyes to gaze at the measureless goodness and love of God, which He shows to His creature, his soul will never reach any breadth or perfection, but will be so narrow that he will be incapable of understanding either himself or his fellows.'

This is a great achievement of love, but not the greatest of all; we are now at St Bernard's third degree of love—that is, we love God for God's sake. In fact we have surrendered ourselves so completely as to deny all our natural qualities, however good and vital; we consider ourselves as nought. When we have experienced some of God's own attributes we have found them extraordinarily appealing, and then, contemplating God, we have felt crushed by His boundless power and greatness—but it is only to escape from our own wretchedness that we try to cross the border of the Absolute. Thus we affirm God and deny man, but this is still a manifestation of our weakness, and we have not yet reached that love of the highest degree, which insists that we love ourselves for God's sake. 'Do not love yourselves for your own sake, but yourselves for God's sake.' The nobility of man is, in this way, fully re-established, because we now admit that God is at work within us to make a temple of our soul.

As a matter of fact, Catherine does not distinguish very clearly between the love of God for God's sake and the love of others for His sake; she affirms them both and confuses them. She is less precise than St Bernard, and in her anxiety to draw a distinction between worldly or selfish love and perfect love she overlooks the distinction between St Bernard's third and fourth degrees of love. In fact, she gets very close to saying that to love God for His own sake is the greatest love, not realising that to love God for His own sake means loving Him for His power and greatness, that is, for His gifts to us, while to love ourselves for God is neither to desire any gift nor to glorify human nature, but to love ourselves inasmuch as renewed and transformed by grace, we

share in His divinity, so that we love only what is of God, and act only according to His will. But if Catherine did not closely follow St Bernard's teaching, she used it as a theme for her meditations, and her aim was very similar to his because, for her also, real love is that which enables man to share in the divine nature, so that his thought and action become attuned to God's, his weakness and perversity changed to energy and righteousness, and his heart fortified so that he may become invincible.

Thus united to God, we become a living flame that burns for ever, because we are united with the eternal fire and have become fire ourselves. We understand why Catherine, remembering her experiences in ecstasy and her contacts with the divine, asserts: 'When the soul is united and transformed in God, it forgets itself and all other creatures'.

These are thoughts that Catherine does not reduce to a system, but scatters here and there in her letters, without strict order or any desire to theorise, but very frequently and with great fervour. She loved theology, she wished to know its conceptions and interpretations, but much of what she learnt was transformed into living wisdom. Many of her thoughts have the beauty of the wild flowers we admire without asking whence they came or why they bloom in this field of corn or that meadow; thoughts that, uttered in the enthusiasm and ardour of faith, acquire a greater urgency than they had in the pages of St Augustine, St ✓ Bernard, St Thomas Aquinas, Giordano da Pisa, Cavalca and Passavanti, even when they come, shorn of their profundity, directly from these Fathers. Her words still preserve the emotion which she had felt during a divine embrace, and have the colouring of a vision; the swift or gradual development of her thought follows the growth of her own being. The very contradictions are the mark of mental conflicts that she has lived through rather than resolved.

She passes swiftly from a clear explanation to a direct, urgent, adoring appeal to Christ, and from incitement to action to the quotation of a passage of Holy Scripture which seems to have little connection with it, from great excitement to the sudden calm of meditation. All this makes her style lively, frank, attractive, even in her earliest letters: 'O fire, O deep well of charity! Thou art the fire that ever burns without consuming, full of joy

and gladness and sweetness; the heart that is pierced by this dart finds all bitterness sweet, and all burdens light. O sweet love, that sustains and feeds our soul! I said that the fire burnt without consuming, but now I say that it both burns and consumes, destroying and dissolving every defect and ignorance and negligence in the soul, for charity is never idle but accomplishes great things.'

Let us fall under the warm spell of this prose, for only thus can we understand it; it is an eloquence of the soul, beyond the words themselves, that draws us into Catherine's spiritual world, just as an image or a sound is enough to reveal to us a poet's world. The warmth and vehemence of this language show us to what mystic heights Catherine had soared.

Her style is not always successful; sometimes her eloquence stumbles and halts; then, checked by the words, we find neither solace nor emotion. Like all writers, she has dull pages, and some passages are involute, heavy, baroque, as happens when she writes without reference to her own direct and radiant experience but from hearsay and at second-hand. To be limpid, compact, logical, vivid, she needs to draw inspiration directly from her own fountain of life, that is, her own mystical experiences; then there is complete correspondence between her soul and its expression, or rather, her style is but the brilliant mirror of her soul.

These first letters of Catherine's, besides showing us the image of her spiritual world, give proof of her understanding of weak human nature, her delicacy of feeling, and constant loving care for her disciples. At times she rebukes severely and resolutely, at other times speaks caressingly, encourages like a friend or commands like a Superior, ever ready to forgive all, provided all will follow the way of God, and willing to take the ills of others upon herself if by so doing she can win a soul. Like a true apostle she strengthens and guides. She writes with the enthusiasm of St Paul, with the charity of Christ. Her aim is a lofty one, because she believes in the union of all men of good will under the spiritual protection of Christ, and the material protection of the Papacy. She desires the triumph of peace and justice on earth. There are glimpses of the diplomatic and political activity she is to busy herself with later, and one begins to see the outlines of her conception of a Church State, while her enthusiasm for the Crusades is also clearly evident.

Already in 1368, as we have seen, she may have realised the necessity for the Crusades against the infidels, seeing King Peter of Cyprus, or hearing the Dominicans speak of him, and this necessity must have seemed more pressing when she heard of Urban V's Bull, and that of Gregory XI of the 1st of August, 1371, in which he appealed to the kings and princes of Europe, the Emperor of the East, and the Knights of Rhodes, reminding them of their duty to take part in the next Crusade as champions of Christ. Before July 1372 Catherine was an eager propagandist for the 'holy expedition'.

We learn this from the letter that Giovanni of the Cells wrote to the nun Domitilla on July 1st, 1372, dissuading her from 'going overseas'. He writes indignantly against pilgrimages to the Holy Land and whoever encourages them. In his usual frank, severe manner he says: 'This desire (to go Crusading) is in the outer rind of it prompted by pity, but in the core it is more cruel than any cruelty, the enemy of all honesty, the gate of perdition, the wasting of all virtues, the loss of all innocence and purity'. Nevertheless, he goes on to say, there are Religious who preach the Crusades and exhort pilgrims to go to the Holy Land, and amongst these is Catherine, who is a holy woman. 'Perhaps you will answer me that the holy Catherine preaches the Crusade; I shall answer you that if she exhorts you to go across the sea by saying that you will find Christ there, I deny this, with all the Saints who speak of it. In the first place, Christ Himself says that the Kingdom of God is within us.' After various apposite quotations, Giovanni says that Palestine is not 'the promised land', as some believe, but 'the accursed land', since God, because of Christ's death, 'cursed its people and its country'. And why go to Jerusalem? What do you find there of Christ? The dead body. What use is it to visit what is dead when the Christian may at any moment in the sacrament of the altar receive the living Christ in himself? Useless, therefore, to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land; but 'if Catherine's words have convinced you and urge you to go', he warns Domitilla, 'since the dangers of the pilgrimage outnumber the benefits to be received from it, and strong souls are needed (not young women), then you must first acquire the sanctity of Catherine, and then I myself will give you permission to go. And if you believe in your holy Catherine more than in all

the holy Doctors, go again to her and ask her how she has arrived at such perfection; and you will clearly see that it was through silence and prayer; because she kept silence for eight years, we are told, and was always in her room, and prayed. You do this first and when you have reached her perfection I will myself surely give you leave to go overseas.'

This is the letter that, four years later, aroused the ire of some disciples of Catherine's, and especially of William of Fleete, so that Giovanni of the Cells was obliged to write other explanatory, almost apologetic letters; but to us now the letter is important, because, besides showing us that even among the Religious there was no longer any general enthusiasm for the Holy Land, it proves that Catherine was already in 1372 conducting an assiduous propaganda for the 'holy expedition'. Perhaps she had heard of St Brigid's voyage to Palestine in 1372, which must have been much talked of among the Religious, given the popularity of the Nordic prophetess. In any case, through the Dominicans Catherine must have heard of Pope Gregory's Bulls of the 13th and 20th of November, 1372, exhorting the faithful to take part in the Crusades. That she preached the Crusades, not only for their religious significance but because she thought they were necessary politically, we learn from a passage in one of her letters, probably written in 1373, to Fra Bartolomeo Dominici, in which she rejoices at the declaration of a new expedition: 'I have received great joy of this, because I think much good will come of it; I mean the good news that Fra Raimondo sent me, that he heard from Messer Nicola da Osmo, about the preparations for the expedition. Rejoice and be glad, for our desires shall be accomplished.'

The fame of Catherine's sanctity spread rapidly and far; the Visconti of Milan heard of her between 1373 and 1374, we do not know in what way. Bernabò Visconti and his wife Regina della Scala both sent messengers to her, but what they wanted of the young Sieneſe Tertiary, or what were their aims, we do not know. Judging from Catherine's reply—a part of both her replies is missing—we gather that Bernabò was out of favour with the Church for having punished several priests, and had therefore asked for her advice, and perhaps for her help, knowing her to be a holy woman and much esteemed in the Church. Catherine

replied with great vehemence as if she wished to drag both Bernabò and Regina before Christ bleeding for the salvation of man, so that both of them, who had lived so far from Him, might bathe in that sacred ever-flowing Blood.

Catherine knew Bernabò's power, his ambitions, his vast plans for domination; she knew he was cruel, had been (and might become again at any moment) the enemy of the Church. First of all she invited him to love, to love with an extraordinary love, and to seek for domination not outside himself, but in his innermost self. The overlordship of lands and States is but temporary, and always uncertain. 'We may not call ourselves lords of any dominion we have in this world.' Let us abandon this ambition, therefore, and count ourselves to be mere dispensers of earthly goods, and let us direct our greed for conquest towards that city that no one can wrest from us—the citadel of our soul. 'Oh, is there any greater glory than to possess a city where God Himself, who is all our Good, reposes, where peace and quiet and all consolation may be found? This citadel is so strong, and governed so well, that neither devil nor any creature can rob us of it, unless we ourselves consent.'

The ruler of this city is neither proud nor servile, but humble and free; ransomed by the Blood of Christ. Here below the guardian of the Blood of Christ is the Church, and who represents the Church if not the Pope, the Vicar of Christ? The Church therefore, and consequently the Pope, are the true rulers of the world; we must all be submissive to both. 'He is foolish who strays far from this Vicar, or opposes him, for he holds the keys of the Blood of Christ Crucified.' And as Bernabò has more than once humiliated and opposed the Papacy, Catherine insists: 'I beg of you, for the love of Christ Crucified, never again to go against your Head', and tells him he has no right to punish priests, even guilty ones, because they are the ministers of God; no one may touch them except the Pope and God. 'I tell you this, and I beg you, in the name of Christ Crucified, not to meddle with them any more.'

We do not know the effect of these warnings and counsels on Bernabò Visconti; if he had expected to find in Catherine support or encouragement for his own cause he must have felt disappointed. Catherine was accustomed to the clarity, sincerity and straight-

forwardness of the spiritual life, and could not muffle her thought in a fog of words, use ambiguous phrases, or give elastic judgments that might be interpreted as encouraging everyone's own desire. A Christian had to stand by the Pope; whoever was against the Pope was 'a rotten member, cut off from the body of Holy Church'. No compromise was possible; every one must make his own choice and shoulder his own responsibility. Perhaps Bernabò smiled at such simple absolutism, accustomed as he was to considering everything from the political point of view, and he may have judged Catherine to be an ingenuous girl, without any understanding of the means necessary to build up and maintain a strong and lasting dominion. But she was very logical. If he wanted to win the Pope's favour he must cease from all rebellion against the Church and wash himself in the Blood of Christ; he must have the same aims as the Church, and fight for her cause. If he really wished to be a Christian and show his repentance for having rebelled against the Church, what better way of showing his good intentions than by taking up arms in the new Crusade? 'But what vengeance shall we take for the time you have been hostile? I think a time comes when we shall be able to take sweet and glorious vengeance, for, as you have exposed your body and temporal substance to all kinds of peril and death, in warfare against your Father, so now I invite you, in the name of Christ Crucified, to make a real and perfect peace with your kindly Father, Christ on earth, and to wage war against the infidels, hazarding your body and substance in the service of Christ Crucified. Make your preparations, for it behoves you to make such sweet amends, for, as you have been against him, now you will go to his help when the Holy Father raises aloft the banner of the most holy Cross, as he has a very great longing and will to do. I want you to be the chief leader, and to beg and urge the Holy Father to make haste, for it is a great shame and disgrace for Christian folk to leave what is theirs by right in the hands of the wretched infidels.'

This request may have given Bernabò a little food for reflection. It is said that even in 1363 the eloquence of Piero Tomasio and Philippe de Mézières had already convinced him of the necessity of the Crusades, and had persuaded him to make his peace with the Church; but the peace he had then desired, and

the promise he had made to be a faithful servant of the Church, were chiefly a clever ruse to get rid of his dread enemy, Cardinal Egidio Albornoz. He had persuaded Pope Urban V to replace him with the Cardinal of Cluny, Androuin de la Roche, his own friend who, he hoped, might help him in his vast plan of gathering the whole of Northern Italy under his rule. But would a sincere and complete submission to the Pope really be to his advantage? He was, in Mirot's words, 'a first-class politician, despotic and astute, presenting a strange mixture of tyranny and justice, cruelty and kindness, never hampered by political scruples or religious convictions'. How could he consent to an act of submission that implied the destruction of all his political ideals?

In 1373 he had been threatened with excommunication by Gregory XI; on May 7th, the same year, his army had been beaten at Montechiari by the Cardinal of Bourges, and later on his ambassadors, sent expressly to Avignon to offer a peace that had seemed to him honourable for the Papacy, had not only not been received by Pope Gregory XI, but, as Cristoforo da Piacenza avers, had been rudely dismissed. The Pope evidently wanted to reduce him to powerlessness, and this he would not agree to. Catherine appealed to him to submit to the Vicar of Christ, but in reality such a submission amounted to forfeiting all his power, giving up his dreams of greatness and becoming an insignificant provincial noble. He had to refuse, even if his refusal were to lead to difficult and painful struggles.

Moreover, what advantage could he expect from leading a Crusade against the infidels? In the first place, although he was a great noble of Northern Italy and, because of the excellent geographical position of his territory, could be a powerful friend or foe to the Crusades, yet compared with the kings and emperors of Europe he was but a modest prince. And what European court at that time appeared favourable to the Crusades? The Council of Thebes of the 1st of October, 1373, had failed to establish a league against the Turks. Bernabò Visconti was able shrewdly to forecast the failure of the Crusade desired by Catherine. He did not follow up her invitation, and most probably had no other political or spiritual correspondence with her.

If Catherine's letter to Bernabò Visconti shows us that her authority was esteemed by princes, the letter she sent to Fra

Bartolomeo Dominici and Fra Tommaso di Antonio, who were at Pisa (a letter that Dupré-Thesider dates March 26th, 1374), proves that her fame had reached the Pope in Avignon, and that in Rome prelates and Religious were interested in her. 'And therefore I tell you: the Pope sent here his vicar, who was the spiritual director of that Countess who died in Rome, and the same who renounced the bishopric for the love of virtue. He was sent to me by the Holy Father, to ask me to pray especially for him and for Holy Church, and he sent me the holy Indulgence as a sign.'

This visit touched Catherine very deeply, and her enthusiasm soared aloft. At last the Crusade was at hand; the Church would rise again to the epic grandeur that was hers, and the honour of God would be restored: 'Rejoice and be glad, for the Holy Father has begun to open his eyes to the honour of God and of Holy Church'. There was therefore no time to be lost: action must be prompt and energetic. Off to the Holy Land! The sepulchre of Christ awaited liberation at the hands of all manly Christians. What did danger matter? Hardships, suffering, death must be endured. The honour of God was at stake. The valiant must now sally forth, fight and conquer for their faith. Catherine would have liked to give the example: 'I have written a letter to the Holy Father and sent it with the request that, for love of that most sweet Blood, he may grant us leave to offer our bodies for martyrdom'. She burned to do something great for the Christian cause; the longing for action became all-powerful and thrust her forward; men and women companions, friends, disciples—all must accompany her overseas.

'Pray to that supreme eternal Truth that, if it is for the best, He may grant this mercy for us and to you; we will all go in a happy band to give our life for Him.' Her fervour and desire were great, but not extravagant; she measured her longing, and found time to reflect that perhaps her wish might not be pleasing to God. 'I am sure that, if it is for the best, He will grant us this.' First of all come God's designs for us; we must submit, even in the things we most long for, to His will. Therefore she awaited with patience the Pope's reply, that perhaps never came; but she did not let all her activity, present or future, depend on it. 'I am sure that, if it is for the best, He will grant it to us.'

Full of trust in God, she went on with her apostolate, striving to make men righteous, and at peace with God, and endeavouring to form around herself a group of valiant Christians who would be ready to bear all hardships and sufferings for their religion. She believed in peace on earth, and desired it; but she saw the Mahomedans as the obstacle to peace—an obstacle that must be removed. Every Christian must take up a cross and a sword and go overseas to destroy the infidel and thus win peace for himself and his neighbour. Only by conquering the Saracen could peace and security be established in the Christian world, which was God's world. The Crusade therefore was not only necessary to liberate a land dear to every believer, but also to establish a state of tranquillity and happiness for the faithful. It was a fight for the triumph of the soul, and victory would mean freedom for the salvation of souls.

Catherine's activity, which grew more intense and more widespread every day, was displeasing to many, who considered her propaganda for the Crusades to be dangerous. Was it right for a woman to busy herself with problems of such gravity and consequence? Her freedom of manner with her disciples and friends also came in for criticism. She had no womanly reserve. Her sanctity was called in doubt, her visions and her mortifications debated. She allowed her followers to kiss her hands and feet, as did the great ones of the earth; was this right for a seeker after holiness? And how could she presume to give advice to everyone, and dare to take upon herself the sins of so many sinners? Who ordered her to fast so long, and so strictly? Her fastings, indeed, were the greatest cause of scandal. Raimondo da Capua says that 'everyone had something to say against the holy Catherine', and enumerated the various grumblers: 'Some said that no one is greater than Our Lord, yet He ate and drank, and so did His glorious Mother, and so did the Apostles, to whom Our Lord said: "Eat and drink what is placed before you", and who can be equal or superior to these? Others said that all the Saints had taught, by word and example, that one must not set oneself apart, but follow in all things the common usage. Others whispered that all excess was harmful, and therefore to be shunned by all who fear God. Some, admitting Catherine's good intentions, said that her being different from everyone else was due to a trick of the devil;

and there were the worldly also, and the openly scornful, who said that Catherine was deceiving everyone to win notoriety: it was untrue that she fasted; she ate very abundantly, but in secret.'

One can, however, understand these critics if one remembers that Catherine's almost complete abstention from food was accompanied by a tireless activity. She was always in prayer, or in ecstasy, preaching, walking, speaking, encouraging, consoling, reading, dictating letters, and keeping in touch with her numerous spiritual family. Those who see things only from the human point of view, as most men do, cannot imagine how it is possible to give out so much physical energy without renewing it with abundant food. Is not eating the constant preoccupation of mankind? Is not a great part of their work conditioned by the need to procure more or less copious quantities of food? This being so, every exception is regarded with diffidence and scepticism. Few realise that there are privileged beings endowed with exceptional powers, and that divine action may so work on them that food is no longer the essential element for life and action. Some of the Saint's accusers knew that many Saints had lived and laboured fasting; but when they found themselves face to face with a woman who had remained for days on end without touching food, yet without showing any physical weakness, they failed to understand her.

We have an echo of this disquiet about Catherine in a letter that she wrote to a priest in Florence, a letter that, according to Dupré-Theseider, was written in the winter of 1373-1374. 'I think you are very worried, hearing about my life', observes Catherine to her correspondent, and adds: 'I am not surprised at this—in fact, I understand you, because I even worry about myself. You are afraid because I do not eat, and you think it is a trick of the devil, and you give me to understand I rely too much on myself. Undeceive yourself, because I place no trust in myself, and rely entirely on God's goodness. As for the devil, I am not so ingenuous as you might think; I know his wiles, and so I turn to the tree of the most holy Cross of Christ Crucified, on which I lean, and I fasten myself to it; and I do not doubt that if I am fastened there with Him, for love in all humility, the devils will have no power over me—not because of my virtue but because of the virtue of Christ Crucified. You beg me to pray to God that I

may eat; I have done so, and I do so now. I have continually prayed to God, I pray to Him, and I shall pray to Him that he may grant me this mercy that in this matter of eating I may live like other creatures, if that is His will, as it is mine. Moreover, I will tell you that God has allowed me to overcome the sin of gluttony, but I am not very well pleased about this, because I would have preferred to overcome it with my own strength and for love; whereas the victory is entirely due to Him. If, however, I can do nothing about this, why do you not pray for me? God will not despise your orations. And if you have any good remedy for my case, write to me of it, and provided that it be to the honour of God, I will try it willingly. Meanwhile, I beg you to judge less hastily of persons and events, and only when God clearly asks you to do so.'

This letter is full of humility, confidence, irony, reproof, subtlety. Catherine has no fear because she knows that she is in union with God, and intent on following the will of Christ, who acts through her. Those who fail to understand how God may use our physical organs must be strangers to the life of the spirit. Why, therefore, should we care about such complaints? 'Let those speak who will. I am sorry for them, not for myself.' This is still her mind, and this is what she wrote, as we have already noted, on another occasion in Florence, probably to the same person to whom this letter is addressed.

The critics, the grumblers, the accusers left Catherine indifferent, but many of those who listened were perturbed. In Siena and beyond the Caterinati multiplied, but so also did the anti-Caterinati. For a Dominican Saint to be so much talked of did not please the Franciscans—they were the Inquisitors of the city—and they began to oppose her. Among the Dominicans many were favourable to her, but not a few were hostile, and while some continued to praise her ever more highly, others criticised her openly. These various and contrasting judgments were soon known in the highest Dominican sphere, as also at Avignon, where everything was always suspect, for fear of old heresies, and alarm at the appearance of new ones. Catherine's activity was no longer limited to Siena; she wrote letters to the powerful princes of Italy, judging them, giving them advice; she was interested in Papal policy and wrote directly to the Pope; she spoke and

wrote in the name of Christianity and of the Church. Might not all this be dangerous for ecclesiastical policy? It was time, too, to examine and judge the accusations of a religious nature that were made against her. It became necessary to take notice of her, to examine her life and thought. Who could do this better than the Dominicans, the strict guardians of orthodoxy, the supporters of Papal policy? Father Taurisano believes that in the Provincial Chapter of the Dominicans, held in Siena in 1372, the 'case' of Catherine was discussed. This may well be, but we have no document to prove it. We may suppose that the anti-Caterinati did their best to have the Saint judged by the highest authority, and perhaps they hoped also to limit or to frustrate her apostolate; but we may also be sure that the Caterinati too were anxious to have her life and work examined, sure as they were that she would emerge triumphant from such a trial. Many of them had been spectators of some miracles performed by her, and some of them had themselves experienced the virgin's healing power, or her second sight, or the 'doubling' of her person, and had been close to her when she was at prayer or in ecstasy. Some Dominicans knew that the doctrine she professed was strictly Catholic, having instructed her in it themselves. And no one could seriously call in question her attachment to Christ, to the Church, to the Pope, just as no one could deny her great virtues. A trial, conducted with sincere zeal, could only reveal her natural and supernatural qualities, and was therefore to be desired, especially as it would be advantageous to the Dominican Order because, after its conclusions, which would certainly be favourable to Catherine, the Order would be able to make a freer and more generous use of her intellectual and spiritual talents. All who knew her burning love for Christ and the influence she had over men, and had heard her impassioned words, or read her letters, could not fail to realise the advantages that would accrue, through her apostolate, to the Christian and Dominican cause.

Fawtier is inclined to believe that the trial was made necessary by the very ardour with which Catherine preached the Crusades. This also, no doubt, was one of the impelling reasons, but not the only one, nor the principal. She had to be examined because many good and many bad things were being said about her; because her activity had now become far-flung; because it was necessary

to know about her faith, her virtues, her gifts; because she had the power of arousing energies; because she drew souls to herself. ✓

It was necessary to study her mind so as to know her intentions. She fasted for weeks together, and it was not sure whether this was God's work or the devil's. She must be examined to test her sincerity and her spirituality. She must be examined because she was endowed with great gifts—also to find out whether she might be useful to the Papacy in propagating the Crusades. St Brigid of Sweden had died in 1373, and it was necessary that her propaganda for the Church should be continued, and Catherine might be her worthy successor. Finally, and most important of all, she must be examined because when it is a question of sanctity the Church must know whether there are present those virtues in their highest degree that are required for its recognition.

And the examination came: Catherine received from Fra Elia of Toulouse, Master-General of the Dominicans, the order to present herself in Florence before the General Chapter of the Preaching Friars, during Pentecost of 1374, to 'give an account of herself'.

Chapter VI

HER DISCIPLES INCREASE

CATHERINE's arrival in Florence passed unobserved. Some of her biographers have indulged their imagination, describing her as immersed in sad thoughts on the journey from Siena to Florence; others say she was pursued and besieged by the faithful and the curious. It has even been suggested that the Florentine countryside and the flowery fields of May through which she passed induced a more serene sense of communion with God—as if she had never had occasion to rejoice in Siena beneath enchanting skies and amid fields in flower. These are but flights of fancy, for we have not a single word from Catherine or her friends and contemporaries to tell us of her thoughts on this journey. Judging from what we know of her, we presume that on this occasion too she showed confidence and serenity. Her chief desire was probably to reach Florence as soon as possible, so as to open her heart to the Dominican Fathers—among whom she had friends—and with the help of Christ who dwelt within her, to show them the sincerity of her faith and works. Had she not always spoken, written and acted under the direction and with the approval of Dominican theologians? She had nothing to fear, and welcomed the investigation and trial.

We know very little about this trial, which attracted very little notice. About five hundred Religious had arrived in Florence from all the Dominican Provinces, to attend the General Chapter of the Order, which opened on the day of Pentecost, May 21st, and was presided over by Elia Raimondo of Toulouse, who had been General of the Preaching Friars since 1367 and who 'enjoyed in the Order and in the Church a high reputation as a scholar and wise administrator'. The Chapter was held in the Priory of Santa Maria Novella, in the Guidalotti Chapel, now the Spanish Chapel.

It is uncertain whether Catherine was examined by the whole General Chapter, or by a special section. Fawtier rightly points out that her case was not of general interest, so it may well be that Elia of Toulouse entrusted the examination and conduct of the trial to those members who best knew Catherine, and so were most fitted to judge her. According to Borghigiani, grave accusations had been levelled against her: 'there were not lacking at that time evil livers who did their best to discredit St Catherine of Siena's holiness with malicious inventions, inspired by the envy and hatred they bore to all God's works; therefore this Saint was called to the present Chapter to give an account of herself and of her progress in the ways of God'. This is all very general, and reads like an eighteenth-century echo of some pages of the 'Leggenda Maggiore', neither more informative nor more exact than this.

Borghigiani prepared his 'Cronica Annalistica del venerabile Convento di Santa Maria Novella di Firenze' during the second half of the eighteenth century, and made great use of Biliotti's account, and of several other MSS and printed works—and for all that concerns Catherine he must have set great store by the 'Leggenda' of Raimondo da Capua, although he 'had not been able to see the original parchment sources'. His 'Cronica' is therefore useful and important, but neither complete nor precise. He himself tells us that it was composed 'in odd scraps of time left over from the various occupations of a Religious', and 'written with difficulty and with ageing sight'. This admission is no doubt partly due to a sentiment of humility proper to a Religious, and we believe him when he says that he 'spared no diligence, even at the cost of great labour, to establish as far as possible the correct and true series of chronological events, and the legitimate succession of Priors. . .'. Nevertheless, the 'Cronica' is neither exhaustive nor very exact, and concerning Catherine's trial in 1374 reveals nothing to satisfy our curiosity. Perhaps Fra Domenico Sandrini, who in 1731 wrote the 'Vite dei Frati di Santa Maria Novella, celebri in santità', is telling the simple truth when he says that 'Catherine was called to Florence to give an account of herself'—a phrase that Borghigiani repeats in his 'Cronica'—'as the Order wished to be well informed and certain about her spiritual life, because of the many stories of miracles

performed by her'. We may also believe Fra Sandrini when in his 'Breve Notizia di quindici sante e buone donne dell' abito della Penitenza di San Domenico', written in 1720, he asserts that Catherine's case was subjected to a very long examination. No one tells us what interrogations Catherine had to undergo, or how she replied, or defended herself; we do know, however, that one of the most important personages present at her trial was favourable to her. This was the Dominican Angelo degli Adimari, whom we have already noticed in Siena in 1352.

Adimari was a learned scholar of exemplary life, much esteemed in the Order. Inclined towards mysticism himself, his soul 'had much affinity with the Saint's'. During the years he spent in Siena 'he had been a witness of all that had happened to the Saint before she entered the Third Order', and in that time, as also later on when he was in other friaries, he reflected much on her experiences, and from what he had himself observed, and from what other Dominicans reported to him, he had formed a favourable conception of the spiritual life of the Saint now under examination.

It is more than probable that he sought her out as soon as she came to Florence—spoke to her, and questioned her, and in this way, investigating her intentions and ideas informally, made up his mind about her. She certainly spoke to him with her usual characteristic frankness and ingenuousness, holding nothing back. Thus Adimari may have been able to observe her spiritual growth, her undoubted fidelity to the Church, and her self-dedication in Christ's cause. He may have himself experienced the burning heat of her charity, and the charm of that enchanting smile that never left her, even amidst atrocious moral and physical suffering. He must certainly have felt an increased admiration for his penitent of former years; and when he enquired into her life and thought he could find nothing there that was dangerous to the Order or to the Faith, nothing but the strictest orthodoxy and true holiness. The answers he received to his questions may have echoed explanations he himself had given her, or had repeated in his own sermons in Siena. There was no doubt that, spiritually, she was a creature of the Dominicans, and must therefore be defended at all costs. No one in the Chapter knew her better than he did, or could better judge her. Therefore he was the first to

give the necessary information, and was at once believed, for 'there was no one else who could give so clear and impartial an account'.

The Order seems to have been satisfied with Adimari's defence of Catherine. After all, it was only necessary to know what sort of spirit animated her, and when it was ascertained that she was strictly orthodox, faithful to the Church and full of love for God and His creatures, what else could be desired? In the world her actions might still be criticised, and she herself slandered, but what did that matter once a philosopher and theologian of the Order, such as Adimari, denied the accusations and reassured the Order about her holiness and orthodoxy? If her enemies still wished to discredit her they were free to do so—but the Dominicans would now take up the defence of their Tertiary.

Fawtier's supposition that Catherine's innocence was not completely recognised by the Chapter seems absurd; if such had been the case the Dominicans would have ordered her to desist from all activity, and to remain in seclusion at home, meddling no longer in Church affairs; and if even the slightest suspicion had still remained, they would have asked her to withdraw for a time into a spiritual retreat. Generally speaking, the decisions of religious Orders are prompted by great, or even exaggerated, prudence, and the Dominicans, given their pre-eminent position in the Church, could not afford to take risks. The result of the trial suggests that Catherine's gifts were clearly set in evidence, and that her judges realised the importance, present and future, of her apostolic ardour, and of her eloquence in speech and writing. Realising also how useful her work would be to the Dominican Order and to the whole Church, they gave her as a spiritual director a friar who enjoyed great esteem in the Order and who, besides being deeply versed in mysticism, was cultured, sympathetic, and also a man of political acumen: Raimondo da Capua. Fawtier rightly points out that 'the appearance of Raimondo da Capua as her spiritual director marks a change in St Catherine's life', and that her activity, under his direction, became more important, because she began to take part in the political events of the age. All this came about because the Dominican Chapter of Florence had understood her genius, her eloquence, humility and spirit of self-sacrifice, and admired her wise judgments on men

and events, and the enthusiasm which inspired her to preach a reign of peace and love on earth.

Catherine stayed on in Florence for some weeks after the end of the Chapter, while her fame, increased by its decisions, spread abroad through the city, and everyone wanted to see her, speak to her, invite her home, beg for her prayers, her help, her advice, and find out how she lived, taking the measure, with due reverence, of her spiritual power. 'Hearing of her fame I desired to know her and have her friendship. Several times she came to my home, and when I understood about her life I wanted to know all about her', says the anonymous author of the 'Miracoli', who tells us that she had dear friends with whom she stayed in Florence. If we think of her immersed as always in her apostolic work we can hardly believe that she also 'wanted to know what was happening at the Palazzo Vecchio, who were the men most prominent in political life, what was planned and plotted in those secret haunts, and the why and wherefore of the widespread discontent manifest to all'. To believe this is to distort the figure of the Saint, and make of her a sort of political agitator running here and there to find out about the aims and plans of the Florentine Government, about secret plots, quarrels among the rulers, and the hatching of revolts. She is described as setting herself at the head of a group of Florentines, who were pursuing political aims under the guise of religious activity. 'In a month Catherine found herself the leader of a numerous and distinguished spiritual family—not only of noble ladies, but of men also—many of whom were in the government, or were leaders of the Guelph party, such as Soderini, Canigiani, Bonaccorso di Lapo, Giannozzo Sacchetti' and others. This picture of her, drawn by Padre Taurisano, seems very fanciful. It is quite possible that Catherine met Soderini and other political figures at this time, as she met the Bishop of Florence, Angelo Ricasoli, but if she did she probably spoke to them of the salvation of their souls, and of their need to bathe in the Blood of Christ—not of political matters. She may have heard talk of the most urgent problems that faced the Republic—but in the course of conversations not deliberately sought for that purpose. She was a mystic, not a woman with a bent for politics, and she busied herself with the kingdom of Christ and no other; the only cause in this world

that had power to move her was that of the Crusades—certainly not that of the internal affairs of Florence.

However, Padre Taurisano, in his generous zeal, would like to endow Catherine with all possible gifts, including political ability; and so he presents us with a Catherine who, in May and June of 1374, in Florence, reveals most powerful political talents and a great curiosity about the internal and foreign policy of the Republic. According to him she was a genius, and therefore possessed prophetic foresight; and, knowing that two years later she would return to Florence charged with a political mission, she wanted to make a thorough preliminary study of the administrative, political and diplomatic machinery of the Florentine Republic to avail herself of this knowledge later on.

All this is purely imaginary, and has the opposite effect of what Taurisano intended, diminishing her figure rather than adding to its glory. Her life was bound up with Christ, and Florence, like everywhere else, was for her but a spiritual training ground, her one aim, here as elsewhere, being to persuade men to care about their own salvation. The only Government that interested her was the Papal government, and that only because the Pope represented Christ on earth. When her religious and apostolic mission was concluded, 'St Catherine left Florence on St Peter's day of the year 1374, and went back to Siena, where there was a great mortality because of the plague'.

Between May and October 1374 the pestilence raged in Siena, not so destructive as in 1348, but still full of terrors; everywhere were signs of desolation and death. As soon as she got back to her city Catherine set about visiting, tending and comforting the stricken, and, when necessary, composing the bodies of the dead and burying them. In the city where she was known as a miracle-worker it is easy to imagine how much she was in demand to help the sick, especially the poorest of these, neglected by the doctors and by the more timorous of the clergy. Catherine went ceaselessly from house to house, from one hospital to another, bearing comfort and faith to all, and to some healing and life. She was always serene: 'I often saw the virgin visiting the plague-stricken, cheerful as ever', says Tommaso da Siena, and this serenity must have been a great consolation to the sick, who were very often forsaken even by their nearest kin. Catherine, nurse and

priestess, was hailed with blessings wherever she went, and invoked as Saints are invoked. At her coming the eyes of the wretched sufferers filled with hope. She did not spare herself in her labours for the physical and spiritual health of those poor folk. When, the body being past saving, she succeeded in saving the soul, she rejoiced at having saved the immortal part. No one knows how many cures she worked; we hear she saved the Rector of the Hospital of Mercy, Messer Matteo Cenni, one of her admirers, and the hermit Fra Santi da Teramo, a friend of Petroni and Colombini and later on her own disciple, and Fra Raimondo da Capua and Fra Bartolomeo Dominici. A careful analysis of the witnesses of all her cures might induce some doubt as to the gravity of the disease from which some of them suffered; but that does not lessen the value of Catherine's apostolic work; we know that she placed her hands on the head or brow of the sufferer and besought the help of God; whether it was her own faith, or the faith the sick had in her, or some powerful influence that she imparted, or the direct action of God—who can tell? In any case, the cures were real.

The plague proved especially fatal to little children, among them some of Catherine's own family, six children of her brother Bartolomeo and one daughter of her brother Benincasa. Catherine was not perturbed about these innocents: their little souls would take wings and fly to God. Rejoicing over her children that had died, she composed their lifeless limbs and buried them with her own hands, repeating over each one: 'This little one I shall never lose'.

During these months of plague Catherine gave herself no rest and lived only to bring spiritual and material aid to those infected with the dread disease. She ceaselessly exhorted her fellow Tertiaries, disciples and friends to do likewise. Few, at least among the Dominicans, followed her: only Fra Tommaso della Fonte, Fra Bartolomeo Dominici, Fra Raimondo da Capua, and Fra Simone da Cortona. Fra Simone tells us that 'the younger friars refused to accompany the priests who were visiting the sick, because of the fear of infection; but I went willingly, led by my affection for my beloved Mother, for they took me to her after I had visited the sick, as if to reward me for my labour; a reward that, because of my love for her, seemed to me magnificent'. This confession

shows the attraction that Catherine wielded over some souls, but makes it clear that the younger friars were far from understanding their duty as Christians, and corroborates what we read in the 'Leggenda Minore', that 'many of the Religious had left the city for fear of mortality'. Even Fra Raimondo da Capua himself might not have braved the danger of death for love of his fellows if Catherine had not been there to spur him on. It was 'through her exhortations' that he became 'very anxious and busy about the spiritual health of those who fell ill and died so quickly', says Tommaso da Siena in the 'Leggenda Minore'; but we can see in the very remarks that Raimondo himself makes in the 'Leggenda Maggiore', about the plague and his own duty as a priest, that the maiden's words and actions influenced him deeply. 'I reflected that Christ can do much more than Galen, and grace more than nature; seeing, moreover, that many fled, and that the souls of the dying were therefore bereft of counsel and help, through that charity which teaches me to love the souls of my fellows more than my own body, and also because the maiden persuaded me to do so, I firmly resolved to visit, console, and instruct as many as I could.' As Catherine's exhortations were the mainspring of his activity, and of that of his brethren, during the plague, he might with more frankness have attributed the chief responsibility to her—but self-love has a way of re-appearing even when we think we have plucked it out.

Raimondo da Capua was, from 1374 onwards, the most important figure in Catherine's 'Family'. He co-operated faithfully with her for several years, as her friend encouraging her to enter a wider sphere of political activity, and as her disciple receiving from her precious instructions for his spiritual progress. He acquired a profound knowledge of her, for she revealed her whole soul to him, and later on he was to write her 'official' life, from which all other biographers, even those who affect to despise his sincerity, have drawn their material. Descending from the great family delle Vigne, famous for its lawyers, and especially for Pier delle Vigne, who had held

'. . . Ambo le chiavi
Del cor di Federico',†
(Both the keys of Frederick's heart)

† Pier delle Vigne, of Capua, was Chancellor to the Emperor Frederick II.

he was born at Capua, we believe about 1330. He studied Canon Law at Bologna, where in the first half of the fourteenth century, there were learned Canonists such as Giovanni di Andrea, the friend of Petrarch and of Gino da Pistoia, and Giovanni, the son of Rolandino dei Calderini. It was in Bologna that he joined the Dominican Order, and he stayed there for several years to complete his theological studies. In 1363 we find him the confessor and spiritual director of the Dominican Nuns of Montepulciano, and here he began to write the Legend of St Agnes de' Segni, showing his own leaning towards hagiography, and a clear understanding of mysticism and sanctity, even if it was not based on first-hand knowledge. By April 20th, 1366, the Legend was finished. The next year he was nominated Prior of Santa Maria sopra Minerva in Rome, and when Urban V arrived in the Holy City he went to pay homage to him—at least so Cormier, though without documentary proof, informs us. A few months later he gave up his position as Prior, preferring to dedicate himself to teaching and preaching. On August 30th, 1373, he was in Florence, and may have been there during the General Chapter held in May 1374. He had certainly heard of Catherine, and had probably met her. He may have heard of her while he was at Montepulciano, for he writes: 'While I was there (at Montepulciano) . . . I was always glad to welcome the friars who came to see me from neighbouring Priories, and especially those already known to me. One day there came to see me, from Siena, Fra Tommaso, the virgin's confessor, and Fra Giorgio Naddi, now a teacher of theology, for mutual solace in spiritual conversation.'

It is not necessary to continue with his account of the miracle that befell the two friars on their way back to Siena, when they were seized by brigands and threatened with death, which they escaped only by Fra Tommaso invoking Catherine's help. What matters more is his report that the three friars were talking about spiritual matters which gave them such consolation. We are naturally led to suppose that Tommaso della Fonte, a man of no great learning or spiritual depth, and certainly with no mystical experiences of his own to relate, may have been talking about the extraordinary things that were happening to Catherine, which he learnt about from day to day, and which filled him with wonder and sometimes with disquiet. There was no one better fitted than

Fra Raimondo to advise him in his spiritual direction of this holy woman, for he had made a special study of the life of the popular Saint of Montepulciano, and had had great experience as a spiritual director of nuns. He was the right person to give an opinion on Catherine's visions, her second sight, her extraordinary fastings, and her union with God. One may presume, therefore, that Catherine was the subject of their talks, and that in this way Fra Raimondo heard about her mystical experiences. And Catherine had certainly heard of Raimondo da Capua even if she did not know him personally—as we see from the letter, already quoted, that she wrote during Lent of 1372 or 1373 to Fra Bartolomeo Dominici, while he was preaching in Asciano, in which, speaking of the 'holy expedition overseas', she wrote: 'and of the good news that Fra Raimondo sent me'. The text here is obscure. It may be 'sent me' or 'sent you', but in either case proves that Fra Raimondo was known to her, directly or indirectly.

In 1374 the General of the Preaching Friars nominated Fra Raimondo as Reader of Sacred Scripture at Siena, and Director of Dominican Studies, with the special charge of supervising Catherine and her fellow Tertiaries, and directing their activity for the greater glory of the Order and Christendom. We have no document to tell us of the first meeting between Catherine and Fra Raimondo, but we know, thanks to Padre Taurisano's researches, that the new Dominican Reader was in Siena on August 1st, 1374, that is, during the worst of the plague and famine, when Catherine was sparing no effort to aid the sick and suffering. On his arrival he must have found her absorbed in her care for others. His description of this epidemic in Siena shows signs of his own uncertainty, hesitation and fear. He had never before come into direct contact with so virulent a plague; his life until then, as a teacher and preacher, had been tranquil, and under his own control. Now all at once, he found himself surrounded by pain, despair and death, and naturally it was not easy for him to take a decisive step. Every day he saw this young woman, whom it was his duty to supervise and direct, careless of her own danger, living in the midst of the stricken multitude, entirely dedicated to her self-imposed task of healing their bodies, when possible, and zealously saving their souls; moreover, those of his own fellow friars who were most faithful to Catherine, Fra Tommaso della

Fonte and Fra Bartolomeo Dominici, were accompanying and helping her. What could he do? What ought he to do? Although but lately arrived in the city, his own mission was delicate and of great importance; could he stay apart in a friary, like other Dominicans? Would it be right to put himself and his own safety first? Catherine's example and words exhorted him to busy himself in the service of others. She was wont to say that he who had Christian charity—and she wrote this the following year to Fra Bartolomeo Dominici—lacked for nothing because he had 'a fiery robe to protect him from the cold, food lest he perish of hunger, and a bed for his fatigue'. Moreover, Fra Raimondo belonged to an active Order, and his inertia at such a moment might bring shame upon it. But to visit the sick meant he might die at any moment, and this threat, which he had never had to think about before and now overhung him at every turn, left him by no means indifferent. Finally, his sense of duty and, above all, Catherine's own example, roused him and decided him to visit the sick wherever and however they were. 'I was obliged to risk my life to minister to the souls of my fellows', he tells us, and this 'obliged' is very revealing. When he wrote this he was an old man, but as he recalls this chapter of his life, he seems to have before his mind those hours of fear that he had had to live through, and to feel again, very vividly, the effort he had made to conquer his own timid and hesitating nature. Once resolved, he went about day and night seeking out and comforting the sick, as was his duty, but since he possessed neither Catherine's energy nor her enthusiasm (he was physically also somewhat delicate) he often went in search of rest and calm to the hospital of Santa Maria della Misericordia. In any case, this apostolate shared with Catherine increased his admiration for her, and he became her devoted disciple when he saw her, in the name of God, heal some of his own friends. He himself, feeling one night the symptoms of the plague in his own body, ran at once to Catherine, to ask her to heal him, which she did at once.

When he first came to Siena he had felt a slight scepticism with regard to her. 'I want you to know, beloved reader, that at the beginning, when I heard her praised and had begun to know her, I was rather incredulous. . . . I tried in every way and by every means to find out whether her actions were inspired by God,

whether they were true or feigned, because I reflected that we were in the era of the third beast clothed with the leopard skin, by which is meant hypocrisy, and that in my time I had found some of these beasts, especially among women, who are so cunning, and are more easily seduced by the fiend, as happened to our first mother.' This scepticism was natural, but cannot have lasted long. Cormier tells us that as soon as Fra Raimondo undertook the spiritual direction of Catherine he 'exercised a constant watchfulness over her whole life'—which was only right—but also, 'a strict censorship of her slightest imperfections, a habitual and deliberate scorn of her visions and revelations, while taking continual pains to mortify and humiliate her'—this was for a long time the policy of this enlightened and prudent director. If this is so, and we may infer it from the assertions of Fra Raimondo himself, it is difficult to see how he found the time to do all this—or do anything more than watch her carefully, conscientiously and assiduously. Catherine left Florence on June 29th, 1374, and arrived in Siena at the beginning of July, at the height of the plague; she must have begun at once her day-and-night care of the sick. We have documentary evidence that Fra Raimondo was in Siena on August 1st, so he may have arrived in July and had some conversations with Catherine immediately, but short ones, so as not to hinder her apostolate, so much needed in those days. He may have been a little uncertain about her in those first days, and sceptical about her supernatural life, and he may even have considered her care of the sick as a routine work of mercy, such as every Tertiary of the Dominican Order was bound to undertake. But this state of mind cannot have lasted long, because the words he used when asking her to cure Matteo Cenni of the plague were full of admiration and trust: 'Mother, will you allow this man, who is so dear and precious to us, to die now?' ^{Ev} when Catherine replied: 'Am I God, to save mortals from death?' ^p Fra Raimondo retorted: 'You may say that sort of thing to others, but not to me, for I know your secrets, and I know that God grants you all you ask of Him'. There is no diffidence or scepticism here, nor was there when, shortly afterwards, as has already been mentioned, finding himself infected with the plague, he showed complete confidence in the Saint's miraculous healing power. ^L These two cures may be ascribed to August and September,

since in October the plague had almost died out in Siena; so it is difficult to see when Fra Raimondo can have had the opportunity to show 'for a long time' the disapproval, scorn and scepticism of which Père Cormier speaks. Moreover, Fra Raimondo boasts of having understood Catherine at once, unlike her other directors, and therefore had sanctioned her long fastings and frequent Communion, and had not questioned her visions and ecstasies.

It is wisest to conclude that the first conversations between the two were probably marked by a certain coldness and curiosity on his part, and perhaps by some incredulity, until he had had occasion to know the extent of her good works (and he must have seen this during the plague) and her absolute faith; this period may have coincided with his own uncertainty as to whether or not he should dedicate himself to the care of the sick; but very soon he was won over by the spiritual strength that emanated from her, and from then on, observing her at work, became her ever more devoted disciple. However carefully he watched over her he could discover nothing heterodox, and had to admit that she was possessed by a superior strength which came from God.

This interpretation is in harmony with the spirit of the 'Leggenda Maggiore', which is one long confession of faith in Catherine. It was perhaps Fra Raimondo's rapid and intelligent understanding of Catherine's spirituality that led to their firm and profound friendship, strengthened by constant mutual admiration. Fra Raimondo instinctively recognised in Catherine the woman of lofty intellect, the great saint and tireless apostle; Catherine admired his intelligence, tact, breadth of understanding, and training after perfection. She knew he was rather timid and hesitant, and fond of a quiet life, and she was always mindful of him in her prayers, never failing, when need arose, to exhort him to act bravely and with courage. He had clear and decided views about the Crusades and about Papal politics, and although his political gifts were not brilliant, he had a sure political instinct about all that concerned the Order and the Church. Urban VI, on becoming Pope, called him his own 'head, eyes, mouth, tongue, hands and feet', which shows that his activity within the Church was considerable. Moreover, the intimacy he enjoyed with several personages of the Court at Avignon is a sign of the

esteem in which he was held in Papal circles, and of the weight attached to his words.

Without doubt Catherine admired his political wisdom, and it is logical to conclude that in this field she followed the instruction and advice he gave her. In fact, he opened out to her new horizons and new possibilities of action, for her intelligence was always ready to seize upon vast plans to promote the triumph of Christianity. He supported the Crusades, shared the wish of the Curia that the Captains of the Mercenary Companies should leave Europe in peace and go and fight for Christ against the Mussulmans, prayed for the reform of the Church, and maintained that the true seat of the Papacy was Rome and not Avignon. These were all conceptions and needs that she herself had seen, howbeit more dimly, and that conversation with her spiritual director, who was also her friend and disciple, served to clarify and strengthen. Thus Catherine and Fra Raimondo were both working for the same ends, and aided each other with a mutual exchange of ideas, energies and counsels. Fra Raimondo's ideas, passing through Catherine's mind, acquired strength and inspired her to action on a great scale.

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Neri di Landoccio de' Pagliaresi, whose life the Saint transformed, was a devoted disciple and did much to spread her fame. He used to insist upon his friends visiting her, so sure was he that, when they heard her moving words and felt the power of her spirit, they would become ardent Christians. His heart was very sensitive, and he suffered from the separation his conversion had caused between himself and his friends. He was anxious to re-establish his former intimacy with them, provided this could be done through all sharing in that love of Christ that his 'little Mother' aroused in all hearts. After much insistence he succeeded in leading to Catherine's cell his friend Francesco Malavolti, a rich young Sieneese, proud, capricious and sensual, who loved gay society and, still more, women, dancing and gambling. This elegant and carefree provincial noble went from one amusement to another, as did many young men of the 'spendthrift brigade' of that day, luxurious, refined and pleasure-loving. He was fond

of Neri, and admired his delicacy of feeling and his straightforward character, but was rather irritated by his friend's repeated invitations to go and visit Catherine. Why should he go to see her? He was quite content with his Siena,

'Di leggiadria, di bei costumi piena,

Di vaghe donne, d'uomini cortesi',

(Full of graciousness and beautiful manners, of beautiful women
and courtly men)

and did not want to be the object of gloomy preaching, or be shown his sins and the necessity of conversion.

It was well known that the Dominican Tertiary talked in this way to her visitors, and he had no mind to listen to it. But Neri di Landoccio had no intention of letting him go, and gave him no peace. At long last Francesco Malavolti consented to visit the Mantellata, he says, out of courtesy to his friend, but probably with a certain curiosity also to see close at hand this woman who was so much extolled, and whom he would willingly have deceived. He went resolved to ward off any rebuke Catherine might utter on account of his dissolute life, and was determined to give her a sharp reply if she asked him to go to confession. It happened, however, that as soon as he entered her cell and saw her face he felt a strange sensation; he himself tells us, 'such terrible awe took hold of me, and such violent trembling that I nearly fainted. God changed my heart in such a wonderful way that, resolved as I had been never to confess my sins, after her first words I went at once to a confessor, and from that day forth something new came to pass in me, so that I was no longer my former self.' This is an avowal that proves how great was Catherine's power over souls, and how well she knew how to bind people to her. Francesco often went back to see her, and she, lovingly and delicately, was able to touch the secret chords of his nature, and to hold him bound with silken threads. He was good-natured and generous, ready to make heroic resolves, which he found difficult to carry out, because the habitual indulgence of his senses drew him back again and again to his love-making and gambling. But women, amusements, and gambling no longer satisfied him as before, and pleasure had always some taste of bitterness and pain, and so, as soon as disillusionment cast a gloom over him, Francesco would return to Catherine who, always full

of understanding for human weakness, welcomed him, advised and encouraged him and gave him her prayers. She well knew his fickleness of heart and grieved over it; one day, in fact—some years after he had first begun to follow her—she wrote to him: 'You cost me so many tears, so much sweat and bitterness'. Yet she loved him and thought him worthy to belong to her Family, calling him her 'darling' because she knew he had a kind and generous heart. She believed in his final salvation. 'You often come to me', she said to him once, 'and then, like a restless bird, off you fly again to your various vices; fly where you will, now, but in the end, with the Lord's help, I will catch you in a noose so that you will flutter your wings no more.' One day, in fact, he ceased to flutter—somewhat late in life, to be sure. In 1388 he joined the Olivetan Order, and became a good monk; the noose had been well flung and held firm.

About this time Catherine's Family received other young converts. Neri di Guccio degli Ugurgeri and Niccolò di Bindo Ghelli, friends of Francesco Malavolti, had taken to mocking him because he had been caught in Catherine's net, and assured him that, in his place, they would have turned the tables against her. He took them at their word and invited them to go with him to see her. They agreed to go, resolved to resist any of her coaxing words, and ready to ill-treat her if she tried to convert them; but when they came before her and Catherine told them what she thought of them sternly and vigorously, they were dumbfounded, and declared themselves ready to do all she desired.

Out of all these faithful and enthusiastic folk who had gathered round her, some of them followed her so closely as to form a real 'Family' that acknowledged her as Mother. Besides those we have already mentioned we find Luigi di Luigi Gallerani, to whom she wrote an affectionate and encouraging letter, Nigi di Doccio degli Arzocchi, who met her through the Pagliaresi, to whom she wrote in 1380 expressing her gratitude for his guidance and encouragement, and also the wool merchant Sano di Maco di Mazzacorno, with whom she carried on a close spiritual correspondence, and Niccolò di Mino, called Cicerchia, and Gabriele di Davino Piccolomini, whose admiration for her found expression in his book, the 'Ricordi', now unfortunately lost, and

Tommaso di Guelfaccio, who was, according to Feo Belcari, one of the 'Nine'. This man, greedy, sensual and worldly, was converted by Colombini, became a strict Gesuate, and later, a fervid follower of Catherine. All these differed very much in temperament, gifts and intelligence, yet every one wanted to be the child of such a Mother. None of them showed exceptional talent; all trusted their saintly leader. None of them was capable of great spiritual flights, but they all had a share in her spiritual life. All these Caterinati formed a compact group, with a clearly defined character and one aim only: to be ruled by the love of God, which Catherine practised and preached. They knew that their spiritual and moral weaknesses were no secret to her, and so they opened their hearts to her like children. They wished to drown themselves in the Blood of Christ, but how could they do this unless she, the Saint, immersed them? They needed to see her, hear her, be near to her, receive encouragement and comfort from her, to climb more easily to God. All wanted to be the closest to her care, and were greedy even of the crumbs that fell during her spiritual banquets. When she was in ecstasy they contemplated her, ready to seize upon the least word she uttered—that they might hear it echo in their hearts, for weeks, months, years. They would watch her expressive face and rejoice or grieve as an angelic smile or look of sorrow appeared on those features so wasted by fastings and prayers.

All these children were dear to her; she shared in their activity and thought, grieved over their faults and was willing to make atonement for their graver sins. For all of them she had the right word ready at the right moment, for the need of that particular case. Sometimes she had to open painful wounds, but her lancet was delicate, and she was always ready to bind the wound with the thread of love. Although so much in demand by all, she forsook none of them in trouble, but looked after and encouraged every one. They often caused her fears and anxieties; she wept over them and offered herself as a sacrifice to God, who knew how insistently she strove with Him for the salvation of their souls through Christ's transforming power. By her side each felt loved and protected, and acquired such confidence as to believe himself capable even of heroism.

If we think of those gatherings in her cell, when she spoke in

the midst of her faithful, we are reminded of the disciples of Jesus on the day of Pentecost. This was a lesser Pentecost, it is true, but here also there was a welling up and outpouring of spiritual streams, and a new apostolic fervour for the service of suffering humanity, in an atmosphere of enthusiasm and joy. Catherine knew how to make clear to a man's heart what usually lies hidden in the depths of his being, and requires laborious and painful self-searching to reveal. She had spent whole years in searching for her own soul and getting to know the divine in it, and so she knew how to touch the most delicate strings of the heart, to teach her disciples how to examine themselves and become aware of the almighty power of God within them, and be set on fire by the flame of the Holy Spirit.

Ser Cristofano di Gano di Guidini was another who could not resist Catherine's spell. He was a skilled notary, who had been one of the fifteen Defenders of the Republic of Siena in March and April of 1373 and 1374. He was a very clear-sighted thinker, accustomed to political and business life, not at all given to enthusiasms. He was a cultured man, and liked to interrogate and listen to the opinions of others, and then follow his own ideas. His friends Neri di Landoccio and Nigi di Doccio took him to Catherine. He went to her cell more from curiosity than from devotion, but as soon as he found himself in her presence and she spoke to him, he was struck with wonder: 'I heard from her about ✓ God *quae non licet homini loqui*'. He could hardly believe that a woman could talk in that way, and yet he heard her with his own ears. Her words were so burning and spoke so directly to his soul that he turned pale. After the first visit he went back again; he thought that perhaps seeing and hearing her again might lessen her effect on him, and lead him to modify his opinion; instead, his liking and admiration grew. He became one of her followers: 'for when I had had experience of her holy teaching and counsel I found that God had touched my heart to despise the things of this world'. He remained for the rest of his life one of her faithful disciples, translated the 'Dialogue' into Latin, had her portrait painted in the Cathedral of Siena, and also in a vineyard he possessed at Armaiuolo, and, out of 'reverence', had two of his daughters called by her name. The 'Memorie', written long after Catherine's death, are still full of grateful emotion and reverent

enthusiasm for her 'through whose prayers I have received much grace from God'.

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We have only two letters of Catherine's dating from the second half of 1374. Each is written to a great figure of that time, Piero Gambacorta, Lord of Pisa, and Cardinal Jacopo Orsini. The letters are mainly occupied with religion but they have social and political importance because of the authoritative positions held by those to whom she wrote. The letter to Piero Gambacorta is a reply to one Catherine had received from him and the ladies of his family, and perhaps also from a group of pious folk, inviting her to go to Pisa, where she was already known by fame. Fra Bartolomeo and Tommaso da Siena, who had been in Pisa a few months before, had probably done much to make her extraordinary life known to the citizens, and the Gambacorta family, always in close touch with Florence, may have heard about the favourable result of her trial before the General Chapter of the Dominicans during May. Raimondo da Capua tells us that 'when the plague was over many men and women, religious and lay, and particularly some nuns of Pisa, having heard of the Saint's great fame, burning with the desire to see her and hear her wonderful doctrine . . . begged her in letters and messages to deign to come to Pisa'. Perhaps Catherine had already declined other invitations from admiring Pisans before receiving this letter from Gambacorta, and it may even be that the people had recourse to the Head of the Pisan Republic in the hope that she could not refuse his invitation. On the other hand, Gambacorta's letter may have contained some personal confession, or a request for advice for himself. One can gather little from Catherine's reply. She says she is very grateful for the invitation which she is sorry to have to decline, on account of her delicate health and because it might cause a scandal if she went travelling about too much. There had already been murmurs about her journeyings in the province of Siena, and she did not want to rouse comment again. However, she believed that, if it was the will of God, she would be able to go to Pisa later on, and would do so very willingly. The rest of the letter is all taken up with religion. We must detach ourselves from the world and become

like Christ. We must overcome sin and acquire the mastery over ourselves, over our wrath, and our own faults; we must study and know ourselves so as to recognise our own nothingness, that real righteousness may be born in us, and love and the knowledge of God. Sin cuts us off from life, that life to which we cling when we follow in Christ's footsteps; it is our duty to keep our eyes fixed on the righteousness of God, so as to punish the sin that is in us, 'and especially when you find your own sin you must punish it and mortify it as much as you can; and see that you do not close your eyes to it, for if you do this you will be severely rebuked by God'. Dupré-Théseider adds the note: 'she is perhaps alluding to a vice or an evil personal inclination of Gambacorta's, of which she had knowledge, either by hearsay, or from himself'. Probably Catherine is not thinking of any particular fault of Gambacorta's, but rather appealing to the Lord of Pisa, who is a man like other men and therefore subject to sin, 'to punish faults wherever they are found', a warning she might have given to any other person.

The letter to Cardinal Jacopo Orsini has a more precise intention, and one which had more importance for her. In September 1371 the Cardinal, passing through Siena, had received a great welcome, and Catherine may have heard about him, or even seen him, though we have no evidence that she knew him personally. In 1370 Orsini was Cardinal Protector of the Republic of Siena at the Court of Avignon, and therefore Catherine may have considered that he, better than anyone else, would acquaint the Pope with her wishes, wishes that were shared by many Religious of that time, by some members of the Curia, and by the Pope himself. She asked the Cardinal to beg the Pope to keep his promise to return to Rome, and also to persuade him to reconcile France and England, and then, with the united forces of Christendom, launch a powerful Crusade against the infidels. And as she had before this urged the same Cardinal not to sleep, but to 'graft himself on to the tree of the Cross', and be a strong champion of the Church, she may have hoped he would become a paladin of the Crusade that was so dear to her heart, and in support of which she had already written, in March of the same year, to the Pope. This letter shows great energy and frankness. Several of her favourite themes return in it: notes that she sounds insistently to induce men to understand and to seek redemption. They must

never trust in themselves, but look to Christ by whom 'life was grafted on to death', when He 'ran as if enamoured to the shameful death of the Cross', in which 'so much warmth of love is seen, and such sweet and gentle teaching, full of life-giving fruits'. She has no fear about freely showing the distinguished Cardinal all her thoughts, and placing before him, with due respect, his own responsibility. 'Are you not placed as a mirror in Holy Church, where lay folk may see themselves?' In all things, then, he must be clear and limpid, he must love his enemies, render good for evil, and acquire strength by becoming one with Christ. Advice, warning and rebuke are merged in a single appeal to rouse himself and reflect upon his religious duties. Catherine had begun working upon the souls of members of the Curia, and whether she knew it or not, was preparing the ground for her future work.

Her visitors became ever more numerous. Events had combined to render her famous: the confidence placed in her by the Order of Preachers in the Chapter of Florence; her indefatigable care of souls and bodies during the plague in Siena; her correspondence with highly placed civic and religious personages; her ever growing fame as a miracle worker. It was not only the derelict and forsaken who ran to her for a ray of light or a word of comfort: it was also all those who believed in the progress and triumph of the spirit, and wanted her to help them to deepen their spiritual life. 'Very many Religious also', says Fra Bartolomeo Dominici, 'went to her, and she comforted them one and all, and edified them wonderfully, so that when they took leave of her they always begged to be allowed to come again. And they were not only the young and ignorant, but also the old and learned, many of whom were marvellously changed for the better by her.'

Not all her visitors, however, were well-intentioned. Among the Religious of Siena there were many who doubted her sincerity and orthodoxy, and thought her fame an artificial creation of the Dominicans. Her greatest critics were, somewhat naturally, Franciscans. We have seen what happened to Fra Lazzarino da Pisa. He certainly became a Caterinato, but his conversion and the great trust he had in her did not suffice to allay the distrust and aversion that others of his brethren felt for her. She was 'an ignorant young woman, who goes about seducing simple folk

with false expositions of Holy Scripture, and sends their souls to Hell, and her own soul too', thought and said some theologians renowned in Siena and in their own Orders. The Provincial of the Friars Minor, Fra Gabriele da Volterra, and the Augustinian hermit Fra Giovanni Terzo were among these. The former, according to Fra Bartolomeo Dominici, was 'very famous in all Italy for his learning and eloquence'; even his enemies acknowledged his great oratorical gifts. '*Nolite decipi in sui rotunditate sermonis*', says Coluccio Salutati; and, comparing him to the sirens, he puts the Sieneze on their guard lest 'with the honeyed sweetness of his speech he deceive you, and put you to sleep with his songs, and at last, when you are sleeping, strike and kill you with his spiky tail'.

Fra Gabriele occupied various important ecclesiastical positions, including that of Inquisitor in Siena. He was a Doctor of Theology, but very presumptuous, a Franciscan, but living a life of luxury. In politics he was inclined to grovel to those in authority. When in 1378 he was recalled from exile, he wrote to the Rulers of Siena to thank them, but was so forgetful of his own manly and priestly dignity as to offer himself, body and soul, to these victors: '*Animam tamen et corpus vestre simpliciter offero potestati . . .*'. There is certainly no sign of Christian or Franciscan feeling here; the Friar served men more willingly than he served God, and if he was still like this several years after having known Catherine he must have been still more of a flatterer, and more greedy for fame and honour before he knew her. Irritated by the constant talk in Siena about this woman, who was moreover a Dominican and defended by the Order of Preachers, and who wrote to Cardinals and Heads of States and grew more famous every day, he decided to put to the test her knowledge and interpretation of the Scriptures, and find out the nature of the fascination she exercised over so many people. Giovanni Terzo, also a Doctor of Theology, was at one with him in wishing to examine Catherine's patristic and scriptural learning, for they both thought that if she did possess such knowledge it could not have come from God. They decided to go to visit her. Fra Bartolomeo Dominici wastes few words on the subject of this visit: 'on hearing Catherine speak Fra Gabriele's heart was changed, and, after that, he often visited her with much devotion'. Perhaps this conciseness of

style is due to his reluctance to describe a scene very similar to that which he had already recounted about Fra Lazzarino da Pisa. Or he may have forgotten the details, or thought the conversion less important than that of Fra Lazzarino, and so not worth dwelling on at such length. We do not know his motives for describing it so briefly. But Malavolti, who, with many other disciples, was present at Fra Gabriele's visit, describes it very fully. Catherine was addressing the faithful who were already in her room when all at once she was silent, and then, with radiant face and eyes turned to Heaven, began to speak, saying among other things: 'Blessed be Thou, sweet and eternal Bridegroom, who drawest souls to Thyself in so many different ways!' Those words at that moment surprised her hearers, and Fra Tommaso della Fonte, his curiosity aroused, then asked her: 'What does that mean that you said just now? Tell me, and let us all understand.' She replied: 'My Father, before long you will see two large fish enter the net', and would add nothing else. The curiosity of her friends and followers was increased and they were all waiting in suspense when suddenly one of Catherine's women companions entered the room and announced the arrival of the learned Gabriele da Volterra and Giovanni Terzo, each accompanied by a confrère. Catherine moved to welcome them, but almost at once they appeared in the doorway of the cell and crossed the threshold, begging those present not to stir, because they had nothing private to say. They sat down and then turned directly on Catherine, asking her the most difficult questions. It looked like a serious examination of her orthodoxy, as if they were trying to confuse her, frighten her, and make her fall into contradictions. Perhaps they wanted to gather from her lips some material they needed to be able, later, to accuse her of heresy. When they had finished their questions Catherine remained for some time as if in a trance—her visitors and disciples began to feel some anxiety as they waited—then, coming back to herself, she turned to the two Doctors and upbraided them, telling them their vaunted learning was harmful to those who professed it, and of very little use to anyone else. The quotations they had made, passage after passage from the Saints, did not prove that they understood what was the kernel of the Christian religion—they had stopped at the outer rind. With this wealth of quotations from theologians and Fathers

of the Church they wished to be admired and praised by a public that did not seek for the profound truth of the spirit; their hearts were fed on ambition and vanity, but she implored them, for the love of Christ Crucified, to forsake dead learning and seek for the living and active wisdom that dwells in the love of Christ.

These were fine words, but not unusual for a servant of God, and much below Catherine's normal spiritual level; however, she must have uttered them with such warmth and conviction, and with such inspired accents, that she shocked and alarmed the two Doctors, who began to feel their own guilt. Sometimes, in those in whom we least expect it, occur these upheavals of the soul, and from stupor, confusion and pain arise impulses of love which, for a time at least, render the spirit like purest flame. Such a radical change of conscience came about in that moment in Fra Gabriele; at once he gave up the luxurious furnishings of his three cells, and distributed all the books and precious objects he possessed, leaving himself only his Breviary; and after this he came frequently to visit the Tertiary of Fontebranda.

Giovanni Terzo was converted, too. He had not lived sumptuously like Fra Gabriele, and so his renunciation of worldly goods was less dramatic. But as his soul was very sensitive to religion he became more and more attached to Catherine and was often at her side as an admiring helper. It was probably through him that she came to know some Augustinian hermits in the Selva del Lago, or Lecceto (the ilex wood), who became her faithful friends and followers: Father William of Fleete, Fra Antonio of Nice, and Fra Felice of Massa.

The anonymous author of the 'Miracoli' wrote before October 10th, 1374: 'In the Selva del Lago' (the wood by the lakeside) 'four miles from Siena, dwells a community of Augustinian hermits, amongst whom is an English Father who is called the Bachelor of the Selva del Lago, and he has lived there for more than twelve years. He is a man of great learning, a venerable man, very holy and a great lover of solitude. He often goes to live in the depths of the forest in caves that he has made himself in dark almost inaccessible places, and there he takes his books, to flee the society of man. And according as he wills, he goes and comes from the church to the wood and from the wood to the church. He is a man of ripe counsel, a friend of God, a great example; he

speaks very little and only when necessity obliges speech. He had never seen Catherine, nor she him, but they had instinctive knowledge of each other through the Holy Spirit, so that each talked of the other's doings, with the greatest possible solemnity and reverence.'

This spiritual acquaintance became personal some time towards the end of 1374 or the beginning of 1375, and so began a close friendship between Catherine and the Augustinian hermit. It is not clear whether it was about this time that Catherine visited the hermitages of Lecceto. According to Giovanni di Ser Mino she actually stayed there, but although this is quite possible we cannot ascertain the date of this visit.

Among the Augustinians there were some opposed to Catherine. We have already seen how the Doctor of Cambridge, Giovanni Terzo, was prejudiced against her before his conversion. Two years later we find Fra Ruffino, called by Giovanni of the Cells a 'Master of vain and worldly philosophy', and Giovanni da Salerno accusing her of heresy. Some of the hermits at Lecceto also must have been opposed to her. Otherwise it is difficult to explain the silence of Fra Filippo degli Agazzari about her. His 'Assempri' were compiled in 1397, after the 'Leggenda Maggiore' had been written, and when many of Catherine's miracles had been accepted by Religious and quoted as examples. Fra Filippo, who set out to show that miracles not only happened in ancient times, but happened also in his own century, never mentions her name. We conclude that he did not consider Catherine's miracles were among those 'of which I have had no doubt in my mind, and about which I am sure I have been told the truth'. To be sure, Filippo's temperament was the very opposite of Catherine's. He was a hard, unyielding monk, very easily scandalised. He saw nothing but death and perdition for mankind, and in the world only corruption and darkness. On a very minor scale he showed certain spiritual qualities reminiscent of Tertullian or St Peter Damian. His mind was closed and contained in a few conceptions, and he attacked fiercely, often with more violence than strength, men and behaviour that were not to his own taste. He was incapable of searching the depths of the human soul, and finding that wonderful flame which is in all men, hidden below the

darkness, the flame that Pascal, who often shuddered at the thought of the utter wretchedness of man, was thrilled with joy to discover. Books such as the 'Disprezzo del Mondo' ('Scorn of the World') must have served Filippo for his daily bread, and his normal tone of voice was that of the *Dies Irae*. He had no warmth of human feeling, no understanding of the conflicts and dramas of life, no way of measuring evil with the measure of love. He must have found Catherine incomprehensible. Compare his words: 'Would to God it might happen thus to all wretched women' (that is, to burst, as a young bride had burst through having worn too tight a dress, so as to appear 'more beautiful and dainty') 'who think of nothing else but themselves and the adornment of their cursed filthy bodies, who nourish their putrid flesh for worms to eat, and their souls for devils . . .' with these of Catherine's, written to a prostitute: 'Do yourself holy violence; raise yourself up out of this wretchedness and filth. You will see that Christ has prepared a bath of Blood to cleanse you of the leprosy of mortal sin, and all its impurity, in which you have lain so long. Your gentle God will not disown you.' Such opposing characteristics as are shown here indicate that Catherine and Filippo could not speak the same language.

Father William of Fleete, called the Bachelor, whose portrait we have seen vividly drawn in the 'Miracoli', was of a very different character from his confrère Fra Filippo. Reflection induced him to consider Catherine's activity with sympathy, and contemplation led him to recognise in her a spiritual sister. The 'reverence' he felt for her before he knew her personally became veneration once he had known her. She had reached lofty heights of contemplation, but she had also the practical activity that he lacked. She translated every impulse of love into generous works of charity, whereas he could not venture outside the spiritual field. Her energy was unusual and superior, as he realised when they met. He preferred to meditate in the seclusion of the forest of Lecceto, or in his caves; whereas she spoke to hundreds of people, raising them from the lowest depths and bearing them from Hell to Paradise. While he loved to dwell among the ancient trees, invoking the descent of the Holy Spirit upon himself, she, inspired by the Spirit, suffered and struggled

to transform consciences. When meditating in the forest he liked to feel himself becoming one with Nature, while Catherine, often in agony, steeped herself in the Blood of Christ, and offered herself to atone for the sins of others. His heart was touched as he watched the leaves, the flowers, the trees, the fantastic lights and shadows of the forest, the worms, the birds with their songs, now gay, now mournful, and all the wild life of the greenwood, that passed him by, or paused as if spell-bound, to gaze at him in fear or curiosity; he loved all this and found joy in it. Catherine, meanwhile, seeking for pain and hardship to purify herself in suffering, plunged into the fray to convert men and rout devils.

Because of this diversity of temperament and identity of spiritual aims, William of Fleete admired Catherine, and according to Cristofano di Gano, touched her habit with reverence and devotion as if it were a consecrated thing. 'He used to say to us: "You don't know her, or who she is; the Pope should be grateful to be one of her children; she really has the Holy Spirit in her."'

Catherine had a great affection and regard for him, too, recognising in him a great contemplative and a man of God. The hermit's experience was precious to her in her spiritual pilgrimage, and when she confided in him she could be sure of his understanding her. Her friend the Bachelor was learned, moderate in judgment, and well-balanced in character; he devoted himself to God, strove after perfection, and understood and practised Christian charity. Like Catherine he was in favour of the Crusades, like her he was strict with himself but full of understanding for others' weakness. He also desired the moral reform of the clergy, but was no fanatical ascetic. He was one of the band of God's eager heralds.

When a critical edition of all William of Fleete's writings has been published, we shall better be able to study him, and to ascertain with greater precision how much mutual exchange of spiritual wealth there was between these two great souls. What we know at present is barely enough for guesswork, but we may be sure that a great deal of the Augustinian teaching that we find in Catherine's work came to her through her friends, the hermits of Lecceto, and especially from Father William. Whatever their mutual influence may have been, we know this, that Catherine

loved him so dearly that, when dying, of all her disciples she chose this Englishman, who had been living at Lecceto since the 8th September, 1359, to entrust to him the care of her spiritual Family.

Chapter VII

THE STIGMATA

PIERO GAMBACORTA's invitation to Catherine to go to Pisa was declined, but only for the time being. It was received 'with affectionate love' and aroused a new hope in her heart that Pisa might be another field of spiritual labour, where the Crusades might also be preached. 'I shall be ready to obey the command of the Primal Truth, and yours also', she replied to Gambacorta. Meanwhile she asked herself repeatedly whether or not God wished her to go there, and this concentration of thought was already a way of preparing herself for the answer.

But in her spiritual Family there arose discordant voices. 'There were some to persuade, and some to dissuade her.' Fra Bartolomeo Dominici, who had been in Pisa a few months earlier with Fra Tommaso da Siena and had spoken a great deal about her there, was probably favourable—and his opinion had much weight with Catherine; Fra Tommaso della Fonte, more sensitive to the petty gossip of the devout Sienese, with a rather timid outlook circumscribed by the life of the city, was probably averse to her journey. As for Fra Raimondo, he hints at the disagreement among Catherine's disciples, without giving his own view; but, considering his character, we may be sure that, in spite of some lingering uncertainty, on the whole he approved of Catherine's mission. Indeed, as soon as she told him of the vision in which she had received from the Lord a peremptory order to go to Pisa, he willingly gave her his permission to go.

The date of her departure for Pisa is not known, but we know that Fra Raimondo, who accompanied her there, was still in Siena on January 20th, 1375, so her journey must have taken place after that date. At Pisa, Catherine and her women companions were lodged in the house of Gherardo de' Buonconti, who

belonged to an old Pisan family, living near the Church of Santa Cristina, and near also to the Gambacorta Palace, in the 'Chiasso dei Facchini' ('the Street of the Porters') in the Kinseca quarter. The three Dominicans who accompanied her, Fra Tommaso, Fra Bartolomeo and Fra Raimondo, probably stayed in the Dominican Priory in the city. Catherine spent her first weeks in Pisa in prayer, meditation and study. She wrote at this time to Sano di Maco: 'We have never yet left Gherardo's house; we shall go out when the time comes that God has ordained'. The numerous visitors, rich and poor, old and young, learned and ignorant, who flocked to her as soon as it was known that a Saint had arrived in Pisa, must have informed her of the conditions and needs of the Pisans.

Poverty and suffering ravaged the city. Since 1371 famine had weakened bodies and souls, and, a few months before Catherine arrived, the plague had decimated the population. Pisa was now a poor, shrunken Republic, and what pride the citizens still had was but the memory of the greatness and power of their distant past. Industries had decayed, trade had dwindled, the fine arts were languishing for lack of the creative spirit. The Government, the shipbuilders and the traders tried to encourage commerce, strengthening their connections with Egypt, Tangier, Morocco, and North Africa in general, but the profits were insignificant. The establishment of firm trade relations with Florence helped the Pisans to eke out a living, but brought no wealth. Pietro Gambacorta ruled the state very wisely; he was an intelligent and able administrator, a moderate man of firm principles, loyal to his friends and allies; but he could not restore to its former greatness a Republic of such shrunken dimensions, short of men fit to work or fight, with a countryside that yielded little produce and was frequently laid waste and looted by mercenary Companies. A bold foreign policy of wide range was unthinkable, when Pisa was threatened on all sides by more powerful states. A policy of peace with all was the only one that could enable the city to preserve its own autonomy and a certain independence, and such was, in fact, the policy desired by the Pisan shipbuilders and merchants, and practised in so far as he could by Gambacorta. There was no other way of preserving their state: hence 'the moderate and conciliatory attitude of the Pisan Government—even at the

most difficult moments it aimed at softening the harshness of disagreements between other states, and proposing agreements and councils to avoid war whenever possible', as Pietro Silva observes in his volume on the Government of Pietro Gambacorta in Pisa. Besides being opportune and necessary for Pisa, this policy was also humane and beneficent for the other states. The Pisans wanted peace so as to be able to increase their trade and wealth, but Gambacorta's own activity in favour of a general peace in Tuscany and Italy had also a loftier purpose, because it corresponded to his ideal of harmony among peoples, which he desired to bring about immediately, if only partially, by binding Florence and Pisa in a common covenant with all the other states. This plan, even if doomed to failure, showed his magnanimity of soul. His opinion, therefore, when it came to negotiating treaties or forming leagues and alliances, was always listened to with respect.

It is not known when or how Catherine met the Lord of Pisa, or of what they spoke together, but it is clear that in Pisa she found herself in a magnificent observation post for studying the political field. It was probably here, guided by the advice of Fra Raimondo da Capua, who must have been all eyes and ears to observe the politics of the various states of Tuscany and the rest of Italy, so as to see whether they were favourable or hostile to the Holy See—and thanks to the moderate counsels of Piero Gambacorta—that she made up her mind about her future line of action in defence of the Church.

She was burning with zeal to preach the new Crusade, and Pisa, linked with the Holy Land by memory and tradition, seemed a propitious field for her endeavours. The Pisan galleys had fought bravely against the Mahomedans, and won glorious victories, in token of which their churches were still hung with standards snatched from the Saracens. The memory of Calvary was always present to Pisan folk, because their own cemetery, the Campo Santo, contained the earth that Archbishop Lanfranchi had dug from the hill of Calvary in 1188, and brought home to Pisa in fifty-two ships. Propaganda for the Crusade might well be popular in Pisa, and Catherine believed that with the help of God she might induce the citizens to take part in the holy expedition. But the time for that was not yet; 'we shall go out when the time comes that God has ordained'.

During these first weeks in Pisa, she continued to receive visitors, console the sad, encourage the disconsolate, infuse faith and hope in all who saw her, and, above all, exhort them to love and pray: 'Let your hearts and souls burst with love', she wrote at that time, and her spiritual life, enriched with new experiences, became ever more vigorous. Fra Raimondo tells us of two miracles she performed at this time: the cure of a young man, twenty years of age, presented to her by her host Gherardo de' Buonconti, and the miracle of the 'vernaccia' wine. The former, although not confirmed by other writers, rings true: the youth had suffered from a fever for eighteen months, perhaps a nervous fever, and one already on the wane, for we learn that 'although at the moment the fever had left him, yet till then it had been continuous', and it had left him pale and wasted; Catherine spoke to him and induced him to purify his soul by repentance and confession; then, laying her hand on his shoulder and thus imparting to him the power she received from God, she convinced him of his recovery, and cured his bodily weakness.

As for the other miracle: one day Catherine was so exhausted after an ecstasy that Fra Raimondo and Gherardo de' Buonconti feared she was near to death. To revive her strength, as she would not swallow even a little sweetened water, Fra Raimondo thought of bathing her wrists and temples, as was the custom, with wine called 'vernaccia'. Gherardo at once sent a servant to a friend to beg him for some of this wine, but his friend replied that he had not had any of it for three months; to prove this, he took the servant into his cellar, showed him the cask of vernaccia, and took out the stopper. Immediately, to his great surprise, the wine gushed out, fresh and abundant, overflowing on to the ground. When this was described to Gherardo and Fra Raimondo, they declared it was miraculous, and the story got about so quickly that for some days it was the chief subject of conversation all over the city. Not everyone heard of it with joy; some were reserved in judgment, others denied the miracle, some used the story to make fun of Catherine. She herself became aware of this when, going through the streets to visit the Apostolic Legate, who was passing through Pisa, she heard the cry: 'Who is this woman, who drinks no wine, but fills an empty cask with miraculous wine?' At first she did not understand the jest. When she learnt

the cause she became very sad and, weeping, turned to God and complained of being mocked; and, as she had never asked for the wine, now, so as to give no further cause for mockery, she asked God to dry up all the wine that remained in the cask. 'The Lord heard her prayer and, as if He could not bear her grief, performed the second miracle that was, to my mind, greater than the first', adds Fra Raimondo, very ingenuously.

In our own day everyone sees the inconsistency and the triviality of this story, and its contradictions. In fact, all the first part might be simply the result of an error on the part of the friend who had the wine: he thought it was finished and, instead, there was some left. The second part shows how annoyed Catherine was at hearing herself made responsible for a miracle she had not worked, and which, moreover, exposed her to ridicule. Her irritation and rebellion are understandable. It is unnecessary to analyse here the somewhat fragile details of this miracle or to underline the futility of the whole story—which does no credit to Fra Raimondo's judgment.

Catherine seems to us much more admirable when, during these months at Pisa, a Dominican novice, Baronto di Ser Dato, introduced to the cult of Catherine by his own Master, Domenico dei Peccioli, the author of the '*Cronaca del Convento di Santa Caterina in Pisa*', came to her to be set free from a disease that the doctors had not been able to cure. The boy spoke with the frank confidence of his sixteen years, while Catherine looked at him with her characteristic gentle smile. Then she said: 'My little son, your infirmity will be useful to you, and help you to save your soul; if you were cured of it, you would sin very much. You will bear this infirmity all your life, but it will not prevent you from working assiduously for the good of your Order.' Here we see the real Catherine, humane and loving with all, knowing that even the friends of God must observe certain limits, and therefore unwilling to perform miracles for their own sake, or just to strike the imagination of men.

On the 1st of April, 1375, in the Church of Santa Cristina in Pisa, where she was wont to spend long hours at her devotions, Catherine underwent what is usually considered a most outstanding experience in the life of a Saint: she received the Stigmata. It is useless to re-open a debate that lasted for centuries,

about the authenticity of her wounds. Officially, the favourable verdict came only in 1630, through the mouth of Urban VIII, and the Office of the Sacred Stigmata of St Catherine of Siena was not ordered until the eighteenth century, and then by Pope Benedict XIII.

Until that day polemics had been harsh and the battle furious; there were dramatic ups and downs of triumph and despair. Frequently, instead of an impartial enquiry, it was a struggle about the honour, or rather, a point of honour, of a religious Order, and judgment was more or less swayed by passion. The Franciscans would not admit that anyone else, especially a woman, had received the Stigmata in the same way as St Francis; the Dominicans wanted to set their Siennese Saint on as high a pedestal as the Saint of Assisi. Peoples took sides and fought to defend their glory rather than the truth; and acrimony was greater than love. The common people also were engaged, clamouring for protectors and defenders, demanding fresh examinations and amassing piles of documents. The diatribes of friars and lay folk became ever more fierce: what had been a Dominican honour and glory became the honour and glory of Siena and Tuscany. A most serious dispute was threatening—but in the end the Franciscans had to retire in good order, and accept, unwillingly enough, the Dominican and Siennese victory. Even today, some Franciscans deny that there has ever been any other stigmatic but St Francis, thus excluding St Catherine of Siena.

One must admit also, that there are eminent ecclesiastics, trained in historical and scientific research, who deny the reality of Catherine's stigmata, because they were invisible. It is true that it would be impossible to prove their existence scientifically, because Catherine alone felt and saw her wounds, and those who, later on, bore witness to them, were her friends and disciples, who believed and repeated what she had told them. As Pietro De Bongnie wrote in his work on stigmatisation in the Middle Ages, 'the witness of friends and familiars, of devout souls who form a faithful and, too often, a blind bodyguard around the stigmatised, cannot be used to support a scientific conclusion'. It is also true, however, that if in Catherine's case we lack objective proofs, or testimony external to her own group, by which the authenticity of her stigmata may be established, nevertheless her

own experience cannot be set aside, and it must be recognised that for her these wounds that she felt painfully in her flesh were the fruit of ardent desire, and for her were very real.

Fixed in her mind was the image of St Francis, when

‘... on the harsh rock between Tiber and Arno,

From Christ did he receive that final imprint’,

and, at least from 1370 onwards, she had longed to receive the same grace. Like Elizabeth of Spalbeek, she had already felt in a vision the pain caused by the crown of thorns that Jesus had worn; like Margherita Colonna, in another vision she had felt the piercing of one of the nails of the Cross; but to have in her own body the very wounds of her Bridegroom was a proof of supreme love, and therefore she ardently desired it. She remembered St Francis, and always saw him as she had gazed at him countless times in paintings that represented him on the mountain of La Verna, in the act of receiving the Stigmata. ‘One day, while she was in Pisa, in the Church of Santa Christina, virgin and martyr, having fallen into an ecstasy after Holy Communion, as she was wont to do, she had begged her Bridegroom for this grace with intense devotion and fervour, and those about her saw her place her hands and feet in the same attitude as that in which the Blessed Francis is usually painted when receiving the sacred stigmata. After remaining thus for some time she came to herself and returned home. Then those of her followers who had seen her in ecstasy and wished to know why she had held her hands and feet outstretched so long, in this unusual way, asked her about it privately; she replied: “O my children, give thanks with me to God who does not disdain the petitions of the poor, but receives and grants their humble prayers”. Then she told them she had long besought the Lord for this grace, and that, during that very morning, after praying for it most fervently, she had received her reward.’ So, for the rest of her life, she bore the sacred wounds, which filled her with new energy and new enthusiasm for the cause of God. In the past she had had clear proofs of the presence of Christ in her, but there had also been times when she had felt nothing but aridity, discouragement and spiritual emptiness—when she had been a prey to doubts and agonising fears; from now onwards her certainty never faltered; bearing in her own body the wounds of the Crucified she was sure of her Bride-

groom's perfect love. She rejoiced even when the invisible wounds gave her pain; like that other great lover, St Francis, she had 'realised' the sufferings of Golgotha, and could now repeat with St Paul: 'I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me'. 'From that time forward, as if, through her Saviour's grace, assured of His presence within her, in spite of all her daily sufferings, in all her actions and labours undertaken for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, she seemed stronger and happier.'

We have quoted the words of Fra Bartolomeo Dominici rather than those of Fra Raimondo da Capua, because the former seems to describe more clearly the central motive of Catherine's stigmatisation. Fra Bartolomeo was not present at the time, but he may have heard all about it shortly afterwards, from those who were present, or from Catherine herself. The excellent knowledge he had of her soul, and his sense of proportion in observing and judging her spiritual development, enabled him to understand the event better than Fra Raimondo, who loved to linger over his descriptions, which sometimes he did not hesitate to embroider. From Fra Bartolomeo's account it is clear that Catherine had constantly present to her mind the vision of St Francis receiving the stigmata, as she had seen this represented in paintings, and that she longed for a similar grace for herself, as her love for Christ Crucified became more and more fervent.

These intense meditations on the stigmata and her longing to receive them herself might lead one to suppose that hers was a case of auto-suggestion leading to hallucination. To refute this scientifically it would be necessary to study the whole process of stigmatisation, and even this would not lead us to sure and unanswerable conclusions. From the scientific point of view, it is an insoluble problem. Dr Jean Lhermitte, of the Medical Faculty of the University of Paris, concluded his study of the medical problem of stigmatisation (October 1935) with these judicious words: 'The process of stigmatisation appears to be utterly unintelligible and inexplicable. In truth, there exists no psychological process that in the least resembles stigmatisation which, when genuine, belongs to a special category of its own, responding to some mechanism that absolutely eludes scientific analysis. . . . And we affirm that there is no such thing as psychological or diapsychological stigmatisation; there is only a stigmatisation that is

at the same time extra-psychological and extra-physiological.'

It would be ridiculous to believe that Catherine was guilty of fraud in spiritual matters, and therefore we must take her word for it when she says she received the stigmata, even if she alone felt and saw them. Once we have abandoned a purely negative attitude and accepted stigmatisation as extra-psychological and extra-physiological, we are free to admit that a special grace of God corresponded to her ardent desire to feel what St Francis had felt. It is not illogical to suppose that if his love for Christ enabled the little Poor Man of Assisi to receive the Stigmata, the same love for Christ may have led to the same result for the Saint of Fontebranda. If mystical stigmatisation is understood as God's answer to a sublime love, what valid reason can be produced for acknowledging the stigmata in one real Saint and denying them in another Saint, equally real?

Why should we believe that in the whole story of mysticism St Francis alone received the sacred wounds? No one questions his greatness; certain qualities of his make him even more beloved than any other, but the greatness of these others is in no way diminished by this. Once we have accepted mystical stigmatisation, it follows that every mystic who reaches a certain level of holiness is capable of receiving it, St Catherine, therefore, as well as the Assisan Saint. It may be objected that St Francis' wounds were visible, and Catherine's were not—but does that matter? Must we therefore judge her to be guilty of unconscious deceit, when she declares she feels and sees her own stigmata, that give her such joy and pain? Her character, life, work and writings prove her sincerity and her balanced judgment. We accept her own account, and believe that in the Church of Santa Cristina in Pisa on April 1st, 1375, while in ecstasy after her communion she was contemplating Christ on the Cross, she really felt impressed upon her flesh the five wounds of the Crucified, thus becoming not only His bride in love and joy, but His bride in pain also, sharing with Him the sufferings He endured for the salvation of men.

In Pisa Catherine's fame spread as rapidly as in Siena, and here also it aroused enthusiasm and disapproval. She spoke urgently and impetuously to sinners, caressingly to the afflicted, as one inspired to the faithful. Giovanni Dominici, many years after her

death, remembering her as if she were still present, described her to his mother: 'In Pisa in 1375 I saw her speaking to some sinners, and her words were so profound, impassioned and powerful, that at once they transformed the black pot into a clear crystal goblet'. Bartolomeo Dominici says she was besieged by those in need of help and comfort, and supplied their just needs, with acts or words, ✓ to the extent of her power. 'A multitude of both sexes flocked to hear her, and some, out of devotion, knelt before her and kissed her hands'—a spontaneous expression of gratitude and affection, which, however, did not fail to scandalise some of the Pisans. They saw her accepting such homage 'as if she were a great personage', and accused her of vanity. Vague murmurs circulated in the city and then found tongue. Even Fra Raimondo, on hearing these complaints, was perturbed and doubtful, disapproving of her behaviour on these occasions. One day he said to her, in Fra Bartolomeo's presence: 'My mother, do you not see with ✓ what great reverence your visitors treat you? Why do you not forbid this, seeing that many folk are scandalised and complain about this, thinking you take pleasure in it? Is it not possible also, my mother, that a certain vainglory may be aroused in you by so much honour and veneration?'

✓ Catherine replied: 'By the grace of God, I neither notice, nor take pleasure in, the reverent behaviour of others towards me. In those who come to me I study the state of their souls, and thank the divine goodness that has sent them to me, and I pray that those hopes and desires through which He inspired them to come to speak to me may be fulfilled in their souls. Moreover, I cannot understand how any creature, knowing herself to be a creature, can be vainglorious.' With these words she cut short a rather trivial disagreement with her spiritual directors.

But she had to withstand the opposition of other worthy men. We know of two incredulous Pisan teachers who went to see her: Giovanni Gittalebraccia and Pietro degli Albizzi. One was a physician, the other a jurist: both very well known in Pisa. Like Fra Lazzarino, Fra Gabriele da Volterra and Fra Giovanni Terzo, they hoped to test the maiden's knowledge and expose her ignorance, and be able to boast of having put her to shame with their searching questions—accusing her of contradictions and perhaps even of heresy. Fra Bartolomeo's account does not give us enough

data to judge of their talents or dialectical prowess. He quotes only one of their questions: 'When God created the world he said: "Let there be . . ." and it was done; how can this be if God has neither mouth nor tongue?' This was a common enough objection at that time and is found in most medieval tracts, but it does not indicate much subtlety on the part of Catherine's interlocutors. Her reply is interesting in its simplicity and sound common sense. After having wondered why two Doctors should go to a wretched woman to ask for explanations of passages of Holy Scripture, which she should instead ask of them, she apologised for improvising her reply, which was as follows: 'What does it matter to me, and of what use is it to know how God, who is not corporeal but pure spirit only, created the world with His word? On the other hand, it is useful, nay, necessary, for me and for you to know that Jesus Christ, the true son of God, took on human nature for our salvation, and suffered and died for our redemption; this is what I need to know, and believing this and meditating on it, my heart is inflamed with love for Him who first loved me.' These words are characteristic of her practical mind: from the Christian faith she needed to draw, not subjects for dispute and controversy, but spiritual power for herself and for all. Such a conviction, calmly and firmly expressed, must have shaken and moved the two academic teachers, both accustomed to so-called exhaustive explanations and subtle distinctions. In fact, after hearing her they wept and were converted; in his enthusiasm Messer Pietro degli Albizzi went so far as to beg Catherine to be godmother to his as yet unborn child, and Catherine consented.

The onlooker most scandalised by Catherine's popularity and the veneration that surrounded her was the very mediocre poet, Bianco da Siena. He was full of delicate feeling, and often mistook his aspiration after ideals for their fulfilment. He was all ardour and desire, and indulged in a perpetual wistfulness. His verses were imitations of the Christian Latin songs of the Middle Ages, and full of feeble reproductions of the poetry of Jacopone da Todi, here and there reminiscent also of the '*dolce stil nuovo*'. He was a facile, but not an original, versifier, adapting from others all he found useful, without much discrimination, feeding his imagination with ideas of the sweetness of union with God, but without seeking this union for himself. We do not know whether

he ever met Catherine. Certainly he had no close acquaintanceship with her. While he was a Gesuate at Città di Castello someone told him that she had become famous and was much praised. He was indignant: how could a holy woman remain continually with the multitude, and accept praise and honour? The world and sanctity were irreconcilable. He himself, a disciple of Colombini, mortified himself in seclusion, and gave himself over to meditation; and could admit of no other way to holiness. If Catherine really wanted to become a Saint she should leave the world, the devil's domain, which so easily induces to sin, and, retiring into solitude, refuse all praise. He decided to put his warning into verse form and send her an epistle in rhyme. The verses flowed easily and sincerely, if without beauty. He urged her to be on her guard, lest she lose the divine grace she had been granted. Many spoke of her, calling her a friend of God, but she must beware of taking pleasure in being praised, because this was all part of the devil's wiles. Praise, fame and honours presented grave dangers for the spiritually minded, and might bring about their fall. Praise encouraged vanity, and vanity led to falsehood. All this prophesying and these lofty spiritual flights exposed her to great danger. She should follow his example. He had chosen 'scorn and mockery and shame, poverty and sickness, and a way of life that seems despicable'. She also should become very humble and descend to dwell in humble places, if she wished to take shelter from the storm and be illuminated by divine light.

He sent this epistle to Catherine, who received it in Pisa when she was absorbed in preaching the salvation of souls and preparing herself to speak for the Crusade. The letter first fell into the hands of Fra Raimondo, who spoke of it with great indignation to Fra Bartolomeo. The two debated whether to show the verses to Catherine or not, and finally concluded it would be better for them to reply to Bianco themselves, to rebuke him severely for his rash judgment, and tell him he knew nothing about the life of the spirit. In their discussion the two friars had raised their voices, so that Catherine, who was not far away, heard them and wanted to know why they were so excited. They told her, and she desired to see the letter, which was then read to her. As soon as she had heard it all she gently reproached them for their wrath, saying: 'You should join with me in thanking the author of this letter,

who so frankly and sweetly warns me, for the good of my soul. He is afraid I may be led astray from the ways of God, and he prudently sets me on my guard against the wiles of my enemies. Therefore, both you and I should be very grateful to him for his kindness.' Fra Raimondo, forgetting that he himself had at one moment feared that all this reverent homage might induce thoughts of vainglory in her, insisted that he should write to Bianco, and Fra Bartolomeo Dominici tells us that Catherine rebuked him for this persistence, and forbade him to do so, looking at them 'darkly' (*torvo vultu*) as she did when she was displeased.

If Bianco da Siena had known Catherine better he would not only have refrained from sending her a reproachful letter, but he would have sought her friendship. If he had known her letters he would have felt himself in spiritual harmony with her, and would have been glad to find therein expressed with clearness, brevity and force, those very conceptions that were the constant themes of his own meditations and songs. But for him they were a far-away mirage, while for her they were an hourly experience. If he had been able to observe her closely, in her unresting labours, he would at once have chosen her as his teacher, as did all who approached her with a desire to make progress in the life of the spirit. Even when far away she never forsook her disciples, but prayed for them and wrote to comfort, warn and instruct them. Even during her laborious Pisan sojourn she found time to write to her spiritual Family and friends. Only six of her letters of the first three or four months at Pisa have come down to us: three to Sano di Maco, two to Fra Bartolomeo Dominici, and one to Bishop Ricasoli. All these letters were such as to arouse love and excite enthusiasm. In her letter to Bishop Ricasoli she clearly expressed for the first time her ideas about the corruption of the high ecclesiastics, and the necessity for reform. She drew a comparison between the spiritual shepherds of olden times and those of her own age. The shepherds of old 'acted like good gardeners and workmen, placed in the garden of Holy Church as if strengthened by this mother, they worked in the wind and weather of many battles, to uproot vices and plant virtues. With no thought of themselves they tended the fruit that they bore to God; they were without self-love, they loved God for His own sake, because

He is the highest good and worthy of love, and themselves for God's sake, giving the glory to God and their labour to their neighbour, and they loved their neighbour for God's sake, not regarding what they themselves might get out of him, but only what God might use and enjoy.'

Today, instead, she said, many of the shepherds are selfish, venal, impious, friends of the devil more than of God, exploiting their sacred office for the sake of rich gains. The church has become a market: 'They love with a mercenary love, they love themselves for their own sakes, and God for their own sakes, and their neighbours for their own sakes; they abound so much in this perverse love—which should rather be called mortal hatred, since death comes of it (alas! I say it weeping!)—that they do not stop at corruption, nor hesitate to buy and sell the grace of the Holy Spirit. They see the robbers who steal the honour of God, and they let them steal, alas! and do not hang them as a punishment; they see the infernal wolf bearing the sheep away, and shut their eyes so as not to see him.' This bitter assertion leads her on to preach with even greater urgency that man must try to conform to Christ, and this can only be done through charity.

Bishop Ricasoli must have been rather faint-hearted, for Catherine begs him earnestly: 'Draw near to this sweet mother Charity, who will take from you all fear and narrowness of heart, and give you strength and breadth and freedom of heart, strengthened and made one with God, one with Him because God is charity and he who is in charity is in God, and God in him'. Her own heart was so full of love that she could not imagine a Christian, and especially a minister of God, as being without charity, because, as she wrote to Sano di Maco: 'Love is not without faith, nor faith without hope', since 'Man has no faith or hope except in what he loves'. The fortunate mortal who possesses all three has 'three columns that hold and guard the rock of our soul, so that no wind of temptation, no injurious words or flatteries of creatures, or earthly love—not even of bride or children—can bring it to the ground; in all these things he shall be supported by these true columns'. Christ Himself suffered the torment of the Cross because He loved; else had it been impossible; 'neither nail nor cross nor stone could have held God Man bound to the Cross, if His love for man had not held Him there'. Through love we

know ourselves to be wanderers and pilgrims here below, weak and therefore in need of support; and what support can be better than the Cross, which will bear us through all storms into a sure haven? Is it not love that makes us seek and find in the life beyond 'the bed of divine truth, whereon the soul may rest and sleep'? That is why charity must be welcomed with joy; that is why 'I invite you to enter a peaceful sea, through this most powerful charity, this deep sea of love'.

Catherine had used this image of a peaceful sea before, but it had been a formal or literary figure of speech, whose full meaning had been as yet unknown to her. Now, at Pisa, she had seen the sea, and reflected upon it; in fact, she had been profoundly moved. She wrote: 'This is new to me now—not that the sea is new, but it is new to me in the feelings of my heart', so that St John's 'God is love' could from that time on be conceived only as a deep sea. God, love, the sea are three terms that become bound up together in her soul, and merge into one inspiring and stirring conception.

Among the many and growing cares that kept her busy at Pisa she did not forget the needs of her beloved nuns of Montepulciano, and she begged Bishop Ricasoli for alms for them, and asked Fra Bartolomeo Dominici to procure help for them from Soderini. In her letter to Fra Bartolomeo she also showed her anxious expectation of the Pope's return to Italy: 'Our Christ-on-earth comes soon, from what I hear; therefore I beg and constrain you to come as soon as you can'. She expected this event in the immediate future. Had not the Pope accepted the two galleys that the Pisans had offered him that year? She was already hoping to see the Pope very soon and speak to him of the Crusade, so dear to them both, which she was preaching so zealously.

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As soon as the news got about in Tuscany that the Cardinal Legate, Guillaume de Noellet, had at Bologna, on June 4th, 1375, signed a year's truce with the Visconti, and that therefore the English mercenaries, commanded by Sir John Hawkwood (Giovanni Acuto) had been dismissed, there was widespread apprehension in Florence because of the truce itself, and in the other cities because of the dismissal of the Company. Pisa was

particularly frightened, because Hawkwood still had outstanding debts to collect there, and because the Pisans 'had not kept their promise to give him a castle'. They feared the Company might attack the city. It was a year of grave famine for Pisa; an invasion of mercenary soldiers might reduce them all to starvation. Moreover, the Republic was impoverished, and could not scrape together the gold that Hawkwood would certainly claim. Not the rulers only but all the citizens were terrified. The records of the English Company in recent years, even when it had wintered with them on friendly terms, were of evil augury for the Pisans. Probably Villani and Sozomeno exaggerate when they describe the moral and material losses caused to the Pisans by Hawkwood's Company in 1363, but there must be a groundwork of truth in their account, because naturally a band of soldiers, especially if mercenaries, tries to get all it can even out of a friendly state—gold, women, provisions. And the conduct of the Company in 1369, while on friendly terms with Pisa, had certainly been reprehensible; in fact, it had indulged in 'its favourite occupation of looting the territory, stealing corn and cattle, putting the peasants to flight, ravaging, destroying and burning'.

Naturally, the citizens were in anguished suspense under this new threat of seeing their countryside ravaged, their women dishonoured and their houses destroyed. Therefore the rulers of the Republic tried to strengthen their bonds of friendship with Florence, asking for her help, and the two cities sent their respective ambassadors together to Hawkwood's headquarters in Bologna, in the hope of averting the imminent danger. But Hawkwood would have nothing to do with general pacts; he insisted on treating with every Tuscan city separately. This was bad news for Gambacorta, and so the citizens of Pisa lived in fear of the coming invasion of the English Company. The onslaught came very soon. Sardo, the Pisan envoy at Hawkwood's headquarters at Bologna, tells us in his '*Cronica Pisana*' that it came on June 28th, but it may have been earlier. In an anonymous '*Cronica*' we hear that soldiers of the English Company appeared in the Pisan countryside on June 25th, and we presume that some detachments of the Company entered Tuscany in advance of the main body, and ravaged and destroyed while they awaited the arrival of their Captain who, with the pick of his troops, came

rapidly down through Prato, and reached Pisan territory about June 28th.

In those days of suspense Catherine shared the anxiety of the Pisans and, animated by her constant desire to help the afflicted, she tried to find some way of being useful to them in this predicament. By the people of that age a Saint was regarded as an all-powerful being who, through spiritual contact with God, could find remedies for even the worst state of things here on earth. The prayers of God's friends had measureless power to convert consciences, transform material substances, or alter the course of events. So in moments of general panic they invoked a miracle, and prayed to all the Saints, living and dead, imploring them to arrest the course of history, or even to reverse it. We do not know whether they begged Catherine to pray to God for the safety of the Republic, and also to intercede with Hawkwood to beg him to spare the Pisan countryside further ravage and looting. In any case, out of Christian charity, she determined to seek contact with the Condottiero. Gambacorta himself may have encouraged her to do so, and Fra Raimondo may have given his approval, but when we read Catherine's letter to Hawkwood, in which she presented and recommended Fra Raimondo da Capua, who was to be the interpreter not only of her own wishes, but also of those of Gambacorta and the citizens of Pisa, we feel that it is the spirit of charity, and not a political purpose, that moves her to write.

She was not familiar with the various political motives of that time, nor did she know the mind of Hawkwood. She had certainly heard him spoken of with fear, and sometimes with terror, when he was drawing near to Siena to impose the payment of thousands of florins, or to spoil the fertile countryside; and she may have known of his constant interventions in the affairs of Tuscany and of Italy, and of the services he had rendered to the Papacy; just as she had heard of some of his most resounding victories—but it certainly never entered her head that he was an instrument in the hands of the Cardinal Legate, Guillaume de Noellet, whose intention was to make use of him to hold the threatening anti-Papal power of Florence in check. If she had known this, she would have justified Hawkwood's conduct, even if she did not approve of it, as being in conformity with ecclesiastical policy. But even Fra Raimondo himself failed to see the real meaning of events; he

also judged of these as they appeared to the minds of the people of Pisa.

The danger was certainly great for everyone, and Catherine felt it as such, and wished to avert it. The English Condottiero, although apparently implacable, had a soul like other men, open to hatred and cruelty, certainly, but also capable of love and pity. Had he not suffered enough in his life as a soldier of fortune, and could he not now therefore be softened and converted by good Christian words? So she wrote to him: 'O dearest and sweetest brother in Christ Jesus, would it not be well for you to think a little of yourself, and consider what pains and hardships you have suffered in the service and pay of the devil?' (Here we seem to catch an echo of the popular judgment on Captains of Companies.) Catherine had heard it said that John Hawkwood had promised the Pope to go and fight for Christ in the Holy Land; why should she not remind him of this? 'Now my soul desires that you shall change over and take up the pay and the Cross of Christ Crucified, you and all your followers and companions; so that you may be a Company of Christ, and fight against the infidel dogs that hold our holy place, where the sweet Primal Truth dwelt and suffered anguish and death for us.' The Crusade was now preparing; why did he, a Christian, fight and persecute other Christians, 'members bound together in the body of Holy Church'? He had promised to be a Crusader. Why did he still hesitate? Why wage war in this land? Now was the time 'to seek after virtue'. He should leave these Pisan folk in peace, and prepare to fight for Christ, thus showing himself 'a manly and true knight'.

Fra Raimondo, the bearer of the letter, may have been told to elaborate the chief points, and persuade the Captain to embark for the Holy Land, thus leaving the Pisan Republic in peace. No document tells us of this, but from the letter of the Sienese Ambassadors to their Signoria, on June 27th, we learn that Fra Raimondo was accompanied by a certain Borgognoni and a Knight, both clothed as Gesuates; and since Borgognoni 'had been a man of evil life, and was very clever at negotiation', it is natural to suppose that he was added as a companion to Fra Raimondo in the hope of agreeing with Hawkwood on some definite arrangement about Pisa. The mission, however, failed. It is true that we find

affixed to Catherine's letter of presentation a note affirming that Fra Raimondo, before leaving the camp, 'received from all the officers and from the said Messer Giovanni, a solemn promise on the Blessed Sacrament that they should go away, and notwithstanding this he had made them write it also in their own hand and seal it with their seals'—but all this is simply a gesture of chivalrous courtesy towards a friar and a woman known as a Saint. In actual fact, the English Company remained near Pisa, looting and devastating, and Hawkwood never had the slightest intention of going on a Crusade. Perhaps he smiled good-naturedly on reading Catherine's frank, ingenuous letter, and thought with a certain envy of the simplicity of religious souls. A captain's business was a very different kettle of fish, and pledges to a Company could not be honoured without funds. He had no pity for the Pisans; he made their envoy wait till July 2nd, and then came to an agreement with Maccaione and Agliata by which the Republic was to pay 30,500 florins, 2,500 to be paid in one day to his chief lieutenants, 12,500 within ten days, and the rest later. 'The English abstained from burning and taking prisoners and slaves, but not from other depredations, until they passed on to Volterra', towards July 8th, as we learn from Temple-Leader, who attributes such restraint to the prompt payment made by the Pisans. It would, however, be reasonable to suppose that a slight attenuation of his demands, and the relatively good behaviour of his soldiery, were due to Catherine's letter, which probably led Hawkwood to reflect that there are some enviable religious souls in the world.

* * *

After having arranged with Fra Raimondo about his visit to John Hawkwood, and dictated his letter of presentation and recommendation, it seems probable that Catherine returned to Siena at least for some days. There is no certainty of this, but some indications suggest it, and the editor of the recent complete collection of Catherine's letters, Dupré-Thésider, is inclined to believe that towards the end of June 1375 Catherine was again in Siena. From her native town she wrote the most human and perhaps the most beautiful of her letters. This is not the place to

re-examine the events and dates to which this letter to Fra Raimondo refers, nor can we precisely identify Niccolò di Toldo—the young noble of Perugia whose condemnation on June 4th, 1375, aroused many protests, including one from the Cardinal Legate of Perugia, Gerard du Puy—as the youth sentenced to death, with whom Catherine was so intimately concerned. In truth, for our study of Catherine's soul and apostolate, these details have very little significance; what matters is the event itself, with its rarely delicate and personal colouring, which eluded Fawtier completely, so that he cast a doubt over the whole episode—thus showing a lack of understanding of one of the most salient traits in all Catherine's life. If the event itself is undeniable, so also is the testimony of Fra Tommaso da Siena, who tells us he was present himself at the execution; and that the name of the man executed was Niccolò di Toldo. He gives no special prominence to this detail, but recounts it, in the *'Leggenda Minore'*, with the same fidelity as when he relates the other miracles wrought by Catherine, amongst which he quite frankly includes this one. If we find him guilty of exaggeration in the *Processo* it is because there he affects a more solemn and elevated style, and so becomes bombastic and fatuous. In this case the fact that most arouses our own sympathy is that a young man was condemned to death for having merely spoken slightly of the Government. Our imagination is aroused, and the youth at once acquires almost a tragic or heroic character—but Tommaso da Siena, like all the Sieneese of his age, did not attach much importance to this; in fact he only mentions it in passing: 'for some words he had incautiously uttered, about the State, he had been sentenced to execution'. This phrase might have been deliberately cast into an aside, so to speak, by a consummate writer, but not by Fra Tommaso; from all we know about his thought and phrasing, we deduce that in the *'Leggenda Minore'* he related what he knew, filling up gaps left by Fra Raimondo in the *'Leggenda Maggiore'*, and adding any other information about Catherine that he thought might be of interest. He is more concerned with events than with names, and although names are necessary to his account, they have no personal interest for him; he might just as easily have given any other name, but Niccolò di Toldo, as far as his knowledge went, was the hero of this drama. An impartial examination of the existing documents

gives us reasonable grounds for supposing that the condemned man, whose soul Catherine saved, and Niccolò di Toldo, were one and the same man.

But let us turn to the letter Catherine wrote to Fra Raimondo da Capua, the fundamental document from which Fra Tommaso and others took their material for their own accounts.

Catherine went to visit a condemned man, whose case was not unknown to Fra Raimondo. 'I went to visit him whom you know.' Finding him disconsolate, agitated and full of wrath, she pitied him profoundly and began to explain to him the nothingness of this life and the immensity of the love of God. She spoke as one inspired. Something new was born in the condemned man's heart; he was secretly moved, first by a revulsion of feeling, then by a strange sense of well-being. His wrath subsided, his rebellious thoughts grew calmer, his distress was soothed. Even his fear of approaching death lessened, and he felt like a child held in wondering admiration in a world of enchantment. He forgot his natural attachment to life, and responded to a strange elusive power that was working in him. He was held fast in Catherine's spell. Gradually love rose in his heart like a radiant dawn; he was transformed. As he listened to her words they seemed to drop glittering to the depths of his soul; little by little he yielded to the overwhelming flow of love. Catherine became his whole world; through her alone he wished to love God; 'the measureless and passionate goodness of God led him sweetly on, creating in him so much affection and love in the desire of me in God, that he could no longer stay without Him, and said: "Remain with me, and do not forsake me, and so all must needs go well with me, and I shall die content"', and he held his head against my breast.'

The day for execution came; the condemned man confessed, heard Mass, received Holy Communion—how long since he had last received it! Catherine gazed at him with joy; she thought of the blood that he would soon shed, and of her own blood that she longed to shed for Christ; she was almost intoxicated with joy: 'Take comfort, my sweet brother, for soon we shall be at the marriage feast'. He wanted her to be near him in the last moments of his life, and she promised to go before him and await him there at the place of execution. This promise filled him with joy, and he turned to Catherine, saying: 'Will the sweetness of my heart

await me at the place of execution? I shall go there joyful and strong, and it will seem to me a thousand years before I come, thinking that you are waiting for me there. Here was a miracle of transubstantiation indeed, a miracle of love, human and divine. Catherine was jubilant; she went before him to the place of execution, where, without heeding the crowd that had gathered there, she knelt down before the block and prayed. Then she stretched herself out on the block, as if to feel the anguish and the hope of the man who was shortly to pass out from this life at the hands of the executioner. She invoked Christ and Mary, and prayed that she might feel the power of God operating, not only in her, but also, and mightily, in him. He would be there in a moment; she wanted him to be able to offer himself tranquilly for the terrible sacrifice. She prayed for light, peace, and serenity for him; she freed herself from the world of the senses, soared aloft, reached the divine, begged, implored, strove to obtain this boon. And then 'he came, like a meek lamb, and seeing me began to laugh with joy, and wanted me to make the sign of the Cross over him. When I had done this, I said: "Now to the wedding, sweet brother of mine, for soon you will be in eternal life". He laid himself down very meekly, and I stretched out his neck and bent over him to remind him of the Blood of the Lamb; he said only: "Jesus" and "Catherine", and as he uttered these names I received his head in my hands, closing my eyes in the divine goodness and saying: "I will".'

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In July 1375 Catherine, again in Pisa, was full of fervour for the Crusade. Her enthusiasm was warlike; she demanded a struggle to the death against the infidel, and a generous spilling of blood. Blood excited her strangely; she cried out at the mere thought of it, as if some primæval instinct were thus satisfied. Yet her desire for blood was not morbid, nor was it a Bacchic fury. Blood was for her the symbol of Christ; it purified and redeemed. It is for us disconcerting to read: 'I desire blood, and in blood I slake, and shall slake, my soul'. The expression is crude, and it would be cruel if blood were not for her the image of Christ, and therefore full of cleansing and sublimating power. In fact, for Catherine it

signified dedication, sacrifice, renewal, because through the Sacred Blood are destroyed 'man's perverse love for himself', and every other servile love, and in it are found truth and light. It is the Blood that melts all coldness and imparts grace; we feel it throbbing when we contemplate Christ on the Cross. It is Blood that flows eternally in heaven and on earth, its warmth producing life. In no way does it pervert or darken the soul, but induces it to love, being itself the fruit of love, and teaches a serene and just contemplation of mankind and the world. Even when Catherine is aware of the odour of real blood, this is so spiritualised in her thought that it gives her a sense of interior peace. When, after the execution of Niccolò, she writes that her soul 'rested in peace and quiet, in such an odour of blood that I could not bear to rid myself of the stains of his blood, that had fallen upon me', it is because she firmly believes that the blood shed by a Christian in a state of grace acquires a supernatural power, and is mingled with that of the martyrs, and with Christ's own Blood, to build up the temple of God on earth. So, in Siena, receiving the dead man's severed head in her lap, she asserts: 'I believe the first stone of the Temple has already been laid'. The idea of the Crusade was fixed in her mind, and she was sure that the blood spilled like red gems upon her white habit was a foretaste, so to speak, of the blood that would soon be shed in the East by Christians fighting against the infidels. Simòne da Cascia puts it crudely when he says that she rejoiced when she saw her white robe sprayed with blood, but this crudeness is softened when we bear in mind the symbolic meaning she attached to blood. And this helps us also to overcome our dismay when we read the many passages of effusive joy that the idea of blood suggests to her.

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The Curia at Avignon was well aware of the great danger which the Mahomedan power represented for Christendom, and saw the necessity of a Crusade, but was uncertain about the degree of enthusiasm which such a Crusade might arouse. Before, therefore, undertaking such a grave and hazardous task, it was necessary to ascertain the intentions of the faithful with regard to the 'holy

expedition', and to try immediately to obtain numerous promises of help from men who would most solemnly declare themselves ready to fight for the cause of Christ, or willing to give large sums towards the cost of the expedition. Gregory XI could only declare the Crusade if he were sure of having at his disposal thousands upon thousands of enthusiastic Crusaders, and abundant means. '*Nos enim si viderimus in hac parte multitudinem populi christiani et facultates sufficientes, aliaque opportune concurrere, indicemus passagium generale vel particulare si et prout reputabimus expedire, et consuetam indulgentiam, gratiam et privilegia concedemus.*' In these lines of the Papal Bull of July 1st, 1375, given at Villanova of Avignon, we clearly see that Gregory, although he desired the Crusade himself, was doubtful of the consent of Europe, and therefore invited the religious Orders and the Papal representatives to direct propaganda in favour of the expedition, so as to be able, later on, and according to the results obtained, to decide for or against the undertaking. This suggests that the plan of the Crusade had received only a partial welcome in the Church.

Catherine heard of this Bull while in Pisa, for it had been sent directly to Fra Raimondo da Capua, and to the Dominican and Franciscan Provincials. She did not linger over a careful study of its spirit or letter, but took it at once as the announcement of a great and imminent event, and rejoiced accordingly. The dream of so many years seemed about to be realised. The Blood shed by Christ now claimed the blood of the faithful. Now was the time to suffer, fight and die. There was not a moment to be lost—it was necessary to run, to fly to the nuptials, and atone for Blood with blood. The Crusade was about to become a reality, before her longing eyes. There, in Pisa with Fra Raimondo, she began an intense and active propaganda, writing to queens, prelates, highly placed personages, acquaintances, friends and fellow Tertiaries, inviting all to go overseas. Men in the height of their strength must enlist as warriors, the affluent must give their wealth to the sacred cause, she herself and her own friends, in a 'happy band', must run to unite themselves to the Word of God! 'And I invite you all to these nuptials, that is, to shed your blood for Him, as He shed His for you; that is, I invite you all to the Holy Sepulchre, there to offer up your lives for Him.'

Meanwhile, in Pisa, Fra Raimondo expounded, discussed and

explained, but the spirit that inspired him was Catherine's. From the letter she wrote to Bishop Ricasoli (Letter XXXVII in the Dupré-Theseider edition) we learn of Fra Raimondo's busy days, spent dealing with questions of the Crusade with the nobles who came to see him, and from her letters written during the summer of 1375 we see with what zeal, enthusiasm and unswerving confidence she worked on men's consciences, now gently, now with violence, urging great and humble alike to join in the holy expedition.

Her letters written at this time are full of the tact and finesse so often found among the simple folk of Tuscany. First she develops a train of thought of particular interest for the purpose she has determined on. She begins by asserting spiritual truths that are of general application, then follows this up with a meditation on the worthlessness of human nature, that may, nevertheless, acquire worth when it is plunged into Christ. We ourselves are unworthy and despicable, but if we sacrifice our lives for our Saviour, we become rich and great in virtue. We must therefore defy our natural cowardice and cast our bodies aside so that our souls may triumph. In very truth, all that counts is the soul, saved and united to Christ; human life becomes real life only when it is spent in the cause of God. The divine voice calls to men to enlist in a great undertaking, one that puts to the test the intensity of our Christian love. Let us answer the call at once; now is the time for the faithful to show that they have firm intentions, daring and generosity. The voice of Christ rings out imperatively: let Him not appeal in vain, lest the future of Christendom be indeed dark. The Crusade is now being prepared. Christ-on-earth is about to proclaim it, and wishes to know who are to be the Crusaders, the heroes of the Church, the future martyrs. Blood is required, let blood be given! Is it not a duty for all to enlist in the Redeemer's army?

Thus, with appeals now delicate, now stern, often eloquent, always rousing and affecting, sometimes subtle, sometimes ingenuous, but always sincere and frank, she reached her initial and fundamental objective: the Crusade. Often it was merely referred to in two or three lines in a long letter; but even when introduced almost as an aside, it crept into her correspondent's mind. In this way, with tact and wisdom, she furthered the purpose that lay so near her heart. She rejoiced at every affirmative

answer she received; the waters were being moved around her, her friends had taken the cause to heart; she was receiving significant promises of help. 'Know that this Friar Jacomo, whom we sent to the Governor of Sardinia, with a letter containing news of this holy expedition, has graciously replied to me that he wishes to come himself in person, and will provide, for two years, ten galleys and a thousand knights with three thousand foot-soldiers and six hundred crossbowmen. Know, moreover, that Genoa is all astir, offering him men and money.' These are minor details for us, onlookers so far removed in the centuries, and they may have been of slight importance for the Holy See, but for Catherine they were events of primary significance, and led her to suppose the Crusade was already almost in being. 'The time seems shortening, because of the willingness of the creatures.' These testimonies of consent gave her such delight that she felt as if all corporeal bonds were broken and she were free to live in the infinite. 'I feel as if my soul, at the very thought, were freeing itself from my body', she exclaimed, writing to her friend William of Fleete, but she did not let this exultation lessen her energy or restrict her activity. 'Now let us run, my children, and brethren in Jesus Christ, let us stretch forth our sweet and loving desires, constraining and praying the divine goodness to make us soon worthy; and here it behoves us to be guilty of no negligence; but to be always pressing on, and exhorting others to do the same.' To Don Giovanni de' Sabbatini she wrote, in a burst of enthusiasm: 'O how blessed will be my soul, when I see you and the others running like men in love, to give their lives away, with not a glance behind!'

Her joy knows no bounds when she receives an affectionate reply from the Queen of Naples, Giovanna d'Anjou. She writes to her at once, on August 4th, 1375, to express her delight. The Queen of Naples is ready 'to give her substance and her life for the glory of Christ's name'. What a lofty and inspiring example! No time must be lost; the Queen must inform the Pope of her intention, and thus he will see the necessity of declaring the Crusade without delay, and she will find the Christians 'most willing' to follow her. The Holy Spirit has inspired her decision; she must make full use of it, and not draw back now, for any reason. In fact, why should she not set herself at the head of the holy

expedition? 'As you have the title of Queen of Jerusalem, so may you be head and promoter of this Crusade, so that the holy place may no longer be possessed by those base infidels, but taken into honourable possession by Christians, *taken by you as your own.*' This exhortation was evidently given on the spur of the moment. Catherine can hardly have seriously thought of setting Giovanna of Anjou at the head of the Crusade. Even if the thought occurred to her, surely she should have realised the reception such a proposal would have had in the Curia, and at the various princely courts of Europe? But Catherine was not politically minded and therefore never asked herself such questions. She thought only of her immediate purpose. Among the great ones who had answered her appeal, there was no one greater than Giovanna; hence her proposal to give her the leadership of the Crusade, without reflecting whether this was feasible or not. She may have been pleased to find a woman, of such importance in the courts of Europe, who in that moment gave signs of having more sympathy, decision and daring than the other princes, and showed herself a warlike Christian, and therefore worthy to lead the expedition. But, in any case, Catherine's proposal was neither well thought out nor definitive. Probably, if Queen Elizabeth of Hungary, to whom she also wrote urging her to take part in the Crusade with her son Louis, had replied with warm consent, she would not have hesitated to acknowledge Louis of Hungary as leader of the expedition, as Gregory XI had done two years before.

A few weeks later, Catherine wrote again to the Queen of Naples, in a rather different tone; perhaps she had heard the reports and criticisms current in Italy about the Queen's moral conduct, or perhaps she had begun to doubt the sincerity of her fervour, not only for the Crusade, but also for the Church. She now insisted, very openly and pressingly, on the need for 'quelling the senses', and for 'silencing sensuality', perhaps an indication that she had now received information, previously unknown to her, about the Queen's sensual nature. The heartfelt appeal she now made to Giovanna, to come to the help of the Church with wealth, and men, and advice, suggests a slight apprehension about her perseverance in her intentions, and was perhaps an attempt to strengthen her loyalty. New events of great importance for Italy, for the Papacy, and therefore for Catherine, were now at hand.

Catherine heard of these happenings from the people she met every day, and from the various Religious who visited her, or whom she visited, particularly from the Dominicans who were attentive observers of the politics of the Papacy, and of the other Italian states. Pietro Gambacorta also probably gave her precise information, and was not averse to hearing the Saint's counsels and general reflections on the course of human events. After June 1375 came wretched days for Pisa. After Hawkwood's unwelcome visit, which impoverished the city financially, there arrived, on July 22nd, a letter from the Florentines informing Pietro Gambacorta that a certain Abbot, *sub nomine pastorum ecclesiae perfidia solita*, backed by the English Company which was in the Pope's pay, was plotting against his life, and the order of the city. The warning was false, but at the time it gave rise to anxiety and distrust, and perturbed Gambacorta greatly. Two days later Florence announced that she had entered into a league with Bernabò Visconti, always feared and opposed by the Pisans; on July 28th Florence declared that Galeazzo Visconti also had joined the league. This announcement too was false, but was believed at that time, and new fears, uncertainties and griefs were aroused by the thought of so powerful an alliance. Moreover, Florence invited the other Italian cities, and especially those of Tuscany, to join the new league—an invitation that implied the threat of force to compel them to come in. The anti-Papal league completely upset the balance of power in the Italian states that had lasted since 1371, that is, all the time that they had been loyal to the Church, a balance that had meant well-being, security and peace for Pisa. This upheaval would certainly be calamitous. Gambacorta was much perturbed by all this because he wanted to remain a faithful ally both to the Church and to Florence. How could he, without a plausible reason, oppose either of these two powers? All his foreign policy had until then been based on this 'sincere adherence to the Florence-Church league in opposition to the Visconti forces that were trying to overrun Tuscany'. How could he make such a moral and political volte face without grave danger for the Republic? The Florentine rulers were upsetting all his plans for peace. Not only was his own ideal of harmony between states preferable for the good of the whole of Tuscany, but a war against the Pope—and if events took their course such

seemed inevitable—would bring ruin to many Italian cities, and economic disaster to Pisa, if she were involved in it, with, in all probability, the loss of her independence. Gambacorta and the rulers of Pisa spent days of anguished suspense.

When Catherine learnt that Florence had set herself at the head of a league against the Church, she was amazed and grieved, but her grief was different from that of the rulers of the Pisan Republic. The behaviour of the Florentine angered her, but not for political reasons; she did not care about preserving a balance of power, or grieve for the collapse of political ideals. She suffered for a human and religious motive, because she saw that the Florentine rulers were disturbing the tranquil piety of the Tuscan people, were failing in respect and devotion to the Church, and were in revolt against their spiritual Father. She did not enquire about the immediate or remote reasons that had induced Florence to make war against the Church, nor did she make a distinction—so difficult for a fervent Christian of her time—between the temporal or spiritual power, a distinction that was just beginning to dawn in the minds of some Florentines. For her all schemes for the expansion and strengthening of the State, and for its supremacy at the expense of the Church, were absurd and wicked; a Christian government that sought to arouse hatred of the Papacy was inconceivable, since the Church represented absolute and eternal values and the salvation of peoples; whoever cut himself off from her fell sick, and whoever turned against her became a rotten member. True Christians were obedient and devoted; they always followed their Mother the Church, came to her help when she was in danger, and defended her in her need. Since threats and dangers were now menacing her, it was more than ever their duty to assist her. Rebellion was contagious, and therefore princes and peoples should be forewarned. She wrote to Queen Giovanna of Naples: 'A child is really stupid and mad if he will not come to his mother's help when the rotten member turns against her. I want you to be the faithful daughter, always eager to assist your mother.' The mother is the Church, the rotten member Florence.

But the news Catherine received became more and more disconcerting; on August 14th, in Florence, had been set up the Government of the Eight, who were to direct the future war against the Church. 'All men of ripe age and judgment, already

experienced in the exercise of other important offices of the Republic, sincere patriots, all of one mind in hating the tyranny of the captains of the political parties; for all these reasons, although they were at first elected for one year only, they were later confirmed in office for the duration of the Government; and as popular enthusiasm had nicknamed them the eight Saints, so this name was given to the war they directed', Gherardi tells us, giving the names of the eight Magistrates.

The setting up of this Government in Florence must have been a severe blow for the Pisans, because it destroyed their last hope of avoiding a dreaded war. When Catherine heard of it, she was terribly depressed, and wrote: 'Now is the time for crying and weeping, and grieving; this happens in our time, my son, because the bride of Christ is persecuted by Christians, false and rotten members'. Now all must pray God insistently, weeping and sighing, imploring Him 'not to despise the tears and sweat poured out before His countenance'.

However, even in the midst of such dire events and disquieting news, Catherine neither lost her inner serenity nor feared for the future. If persecution came, God had permitted it, and therefore there was need of it. Moreover, there was much evil in the Church, and a certain purification would be useful. So she turned her gaze from a negative vision of the present and future, and turned towards the positive and actual. Poetry as fresh as the smile that lightens a child's face after tears sprang from her heart: 'My soul rejoices and is glad, because there amid the thorns is the fragrance of the rose that is to be'. She can lose heart only for a moment; she knows that God is with the just, with His Church. She has startling proof of this as soon as she thinks of the results already obtained in favour of the Crusade—so many people have written to her and declared their readiness to sacrifice themselves and their possessions to win back for the Church the sepulchre of Christ! There is no room for doubt, only for joy; grief is there, to be sure, and such as to pierce the soul, but there are joys also, and these surpass all pain. 'Again, I rejoice and exult at the sweet results that have been brought about in Christ-on-earth, because of the holy expedition, and I rejoice again at what has been done, is being done, and shall be done, through grace divine.'

For some months after this July, Catherine was a little less ardent in preaching the Crusade, although the ideal remained constantly in her mind. In the letters of this period that have come down to us, written to her disciples and friends, she hardly refers to it again. She is absorbed in other preoccupations and duties. The apparent inevitability of war between Florence and the Papacy, the formidable threat to the Church presented by the Florentine pact with the Visconti, the moral and spiritual causes of what might develop into a general catastrophe, the need for the Pope's return to Rome, her own duty to the Church in this crisis—all these questions were pressing upon her and absorbing all her energies.

Meanwhile, she undertook diplomatic missions to Pisa and Lucca, cared tirelessly for the sick and needy, conversed with folk in high office, and visited the Carthusian monasteries of Calci and Gorgona. Nevertheless, after speaking of the Crusade with the Ambassador of the Queen of Cyprus, she could not restrain her joy and wrote to her Tertiaries: 'The affairs of the expedition prosper more and more, and the glory of God increases every day'. As soon as she heard that the Giovanniti were preparing an expedition overseas her old fervour returned, and she wrote to the Count of Monna Agnola and his companions: 'Now I believe that God is inviting you to pursue and achieve your own perfection, giving you such a hunger for the salvation of the infidels. Methinks he wants you to be the first warriors to confront them, since this is now the beginning of the holy expedition. The Holy Father first sends out the holy militia of the Church, and then whoever may wish to follow them.'

We find an outburst of fervour in the letter she wrote to Bartolomeo Smeducci di San Severino, full of her anguished realisation of the corruption of the clergy. Already, in her letter to Bishop Ricasoli, some months earlier, she had spoken of corruption amongst the priests; now her judgment is more searching and more precise. Most probably the incessant propaganda of the Florentines against the Court of Avignon and the ecclesiastics in general, and the subtlety and skill with which they exposed the degeneration of the Church, together with the widespread criticism she must herself have heard of clerical immorality, caused her to meditate more insistently on the wounds of

Holy Church. Indeed, no one could deny the vices of the clergy. Immorality, avarice, pride, simony reign 'in the bride of Christ, in the prelates who care for nothing but pleasures, honours and great wealth', she wrote to Berengario, the Abbot of Lézat, who had asked for her advice and judgment on the Church. She went on: 'The great ecclesiastics think of nothing but eating, and fine houses and fat horses. Alas! that what Christ purchased on the wood of the Cross should now be spent on prostitutes!' Was it to be wondered at, then, that such behaviour on the part of high ecclesiastics caused members of the Church to become rotten? And what was there strange now about the Church being persecuted? Was persecution not a logical consequence of the unworthy behaviour of the leaders? Even this quarrel between Florence and the Church was due to the corruption of the clergy. All material evil was always caused by a spiritual disturbance—therefore it was necessary to analyse the real causes of the evil, and cure these first of all. Reform must begin in the highest spheres; if Christian life could be seen in these restored in all its splendour, then the masses too would purify their lives, and no one would give further heed to Florentine propaganda, nor would the children rebel against their Father, but peace would reign in the whole world under the rule of Christ-on-earth.

This conception of Church reform became ever clearer to her, and as she believed that purification must begin from above, she decided that the Pope must be the first to reform himself. He was too tender and anxious about his own relatives, and showed too much gentleness and mercy to the prelates. 'Too much pity is very great cruelty.' He should correct with severity but without harshness, and root out even the smallest evil.

Justice was needed, for mercy lost its meaning unless it were based on justice, a loving but not a lax justice, which would not permit personal advantages at the expense of others, nor act for the profit of the moment, but for the greatness and welfare of all. Only by means of justice could the Church fulfil its proper function in the world. All must be ordered according to justice. Therefore, 'when the time comes for the appointment of priests and Cardinals, flattery must have no voice in it, nor wealth, nor simony'. Then, turning more directly to the Abbot of Lézat, the Apostolic Nunzio in Tuscany, she exhorted him to speak to the

Pope, to persuade him to be severe with himself, with the Cardinals, Legates, and all the high officers of the Church; to prevent those iniquities that defame the daughter of Christ, and appoint Cardinals and priests of holy life. 'Beg him, when you can, to look for virtue, and a good and holy name in a man. Let him not look for gentle birth any more than for wealth: it is virtue that makes a man noble and pleasing to God.'

All this reform was certainly imperative, but impossible to bring about in a short space of time; it was a long and difficult labour requiring tact, robust energies, and lively sensibility. It was necessary for a majority in the Church to feel its urgency and demand it. But that could not happen until the evil had reached its climax. 'To remedy this it will be needful to pull everything down, even to the foundations.'

In any case, a crisis was at hand, and the Florentine war against the Papacy might be the means of arousing the Church to a knowledge of its own evils and even a means of remedying them. When she lifted her eyes above the present contingency and considered the Church in her eternal function, she saw that the Church was whole; her present state of decadence and impurity was therefore only temporary. The Church must be and should be pure.

Of the events of her day Catherine knew only of some particular happenings, related sometimes with inexact information, and mingled with popular rumour and more or less partisan opinion; but her perceptions were keen and she was able to draw her own conclusions, based on her own firm religious principles. She was accustomed to destroy within herself all elements extraneous to her religious life, and to seek clarity and harmony, and she applied this method to external life and to history, reducing it all to a harmonious and rhythmical process. Thus, what was painful and tragic became an integrating part of what was joyful and loving and prepared the triumph of the good. As in the individual man sin is a sign of weakness, so the agitations of peoples and the troubles that fall upon them and seem to crush them serve, in reality, as a means of re-birth.

This clear-sightedness enabled her to understand that the implacable war waged by Florence against the Church was only an episode, and one that would in the end lead to the strengthening

of the Church in Italy, and its greater glory. Thus, in her simplicity, she could judge certain events of her own day just as we can judge them now after so many centuries of history and criticism. The labour we daily devote to the study of documents and sources leads us to no better results than those she obtained by the observance of a few sure and certain principles, and expressed, as if by magic, in a few brief words. Her serenity in the present and hope for the future prevented her from living in fear of sad, painful and dread events. She knew that although each event has its own particular significance, nevertheless it plays its part in the great plan for man's salvation. We may condemn grave iniquities, and loathe them, yet, nevertheless, we may see that they are necessary for the unfolding of history. Therefore the clash of interests and passions left her indifferent, because she saw all these as details of a cosmic process intended by God. She suffered and shuddered for the sins of individuals, sometimes inveighing against them like a figure of tragedy, but before the unfolding of the universal life of man she showed the immobility of a Greek statue. This is the two-sided nature of the apostolic soul, which shares in the individual life and suffers with it, but observes with indifference the development of the whole vast process of history.

She is sure that the Church is divine, and must ultimately triumph, but meanwhile she must not remain inert. She must collaborate with Providence. Hence the need to combat evil, which will one day assuredly be conquered, but now is still a force to be reckoned with, and therefore opposed. For example, Florence undermines the prestige of the Church, ill-treats priests, sows distrust and revolt among the peoples subject to the Holy See, and persistently spreads anti-Papal propaganda; therefore her efforts must be met and opposed with faith, sincerity, truth, purity, and a constructive spirit.

Some of the accusations against the clergy are true; this must be acknowledged and a remedy must be found. It is true that most of the Papal Legates are French, she says, and yet wield power in our country, exploiting our cities and impoverishing our people to their own profit; corruption is rife at the Court of Avignon; worldliness has taken the place of spirituality; but all these reasons, and others one might add, do not justify rebellion against the

Church. Not opposition but reform is required. Catherine herself desires reform and preaches it everywhere. If all would do likewise, instead of stirring up the people and inciting to war, the clergy would be forced to mend their way of life, and the rulers of the cities would have to rule with justice for the good of all. Then Florence would no longer have to send, as a token of homage to the rebellious cities, red standards with the word '*Libertas*' inscribed in silver thereon, for the heart of every Christian would bear the word 'liberty' written in letters of fire. If there were even a little love between men, there would be no revolts. Therefore covetousness, hatred, vanity, sensuality, lust for power—all these must be destroyed; the Church must be loved, and the Pope, the father of all, obeyed. Then all would live in perfect concord. The kingdom of Christ must be extended in this world, and instead of envy, jealousy and hatred, men must seek unity and love, and set off like a band of brothers to fight the infidels.

These were Catherine's ideas, and she furthered the Papal cause by propagating them. But she wanted to do still more. She was then in Pisa, near to Lucca. Both these cities were loyal to the Pope, but Florence was threatening and flattering them by turns, endeavouring at all costs to detach them from their allegiance and include them in the anti-Papal League. She conceived it to be her duty to speak with the rulers of both Republics, and urge them to resist the Florentine requests. We have no sure proof that she received this mission from the Pope, and it seems more probable that she acted according to her own wish, on the advice of Raimondo da Capua, or of other Dominican leaders, and perhaps on that of the Archbishop of Pisa. These prelates must have been quivering with indignation at the behaviour of the Florentines, and it would be natural for them to think of sending Catherine, who was so well known by fame in both these cities, to try to deter their rulers from joining the League. The results of her mission were mediocre. Pietro Gambacorta was already on the Papal side before Catherine treated with him officially. He loved the Pope, and he loved peace, and had been doing his best to resist the persistent requests of Florence, his neighbour and ally. He was determined, at least, to remain neutral between the two parties. His conversations with Catherine were certainly cordial,

for he admired her holiness and eloquence. He probably revealed to her the political difficulties that beset him, informed her of the most important events of the day, and explained to her his own plans and aims, based on a general understanding with the Papacy. He had, in fact, more than once requested Florence to form a league which might include the Papacy also. It may safely be concluded that the advice Catherine gave later on to the Pope, to invite the rebels to make a general peace, was suggested to her by Gambacorta in these days. It was certainly good advice. Since August the Pope had been sending Bull after Bull to the Florentines to explain his own intentions and conduct, to eliminate misunderstandings, to deny accusations, and recall them to filial obedience; it would have been a wise, as well as a daring move, to take the initiative in promoting a real and genuine peace.

Catherine must have felt reassured by Gambacorta's words; she had great confidence in him, and thought him much more powerful than he really was—so she wrote to the Elders of Lucca that they were to have no fear, because 'the Pisans, your neighbours, as long as you persevere and remain firm, will never fail you, but will always help you and defend you, even to the death, from whoever might seek to harm you'. These words reveal her ignorance of the political and military weakness of the Pisan Republic, which was, materially speaking, incapable of supporting Lucca, and also show her ingenuousness with regard to Gambacorta's position, for he could not afford to come to blows with Florence. She had interpreted his assurances in an absolute sense, without realising that the assurances of politicians are always conditioned by times and circumstances, and are never such as to pledge the future unconditionally. Catherine thought that Pisa would court destruction rather than give in to the League. She presupposed in others her own vigorous character, and imagined them faithful to their ideals, even at the cost of life itself.

Meanwhile, Gambacorta, quite understandably, while assuring her of his loyalty to the Pope, sent his ambassadors to Florence to begin negotiations about joining the League. After all, he still hoped for the formation of a general league which should include the Pope. In acting thus, he was therefore acting with cogency—a cogency, however, that ended in his giving up his own plan and

joining the League unconditionally, concealing in his heart the secret hope of reconciling Florence to the Church.

Catherine had less confidence in Lucca. She went there, perhaps encouraged to do so by Gregory XI's letter to the Lucchesi of August 10th, on September 14th or thereabouts, accompanied by her Dominican directors and disciples; and in Lucca she inspired with her own zeal a group of Mantellate, and spoke to the Elders of the City, urging them to resist. She had no great hopes of them, knowing their hesitancy and their ambiguous behaviour. In the letter she wrote to the Elders later on, she made use of spiritual weapons to try to prevent the Lucchesi from joining the League, but the Lucchesi were afraid of the crossbowmen of Florence. She promised them the Pope's moral support, but what they needed were a militia and money. Her words were grand and fine: 'He is powerful, our gentle God, He will and can keep us safe from the hands of our enemies, provided that we care for His honour, and the honour of Holy Church, which is our honour too—for the soul receives no light but through the Church'. But what would fine words avail if Lucca were conquered by the Florentines, and reduced to slavery? That is why the Lucchesi pointed out to her that the Pope, Head of the Church, gave them no 'comfort', meaning that he sent them no material help, such as might preserve their safety. If Pisa and Lucca were to fall a prey to the League, would that not be a worse misfortune for both cities than if they were to belong to the League?

In fact, Catherine knew little of the political manœuvres and tricks that the Florentines, on the one hand, and the Pope and his Legates on the other, were employing to reduce each other's fighting capacity, so that her frank, sincere words were sometimes wasted in causes that were other than she thought. Nevertheless, her influence on the rulers of Pisa and Lucca was beneficial, if slight, and may have contributed morally to the fact that the two Republics held out for several months against the appeal from Florence. For a certain time her advice was listened to because it coincided with the interests of the two cities, but later on it was ignored. Pisa and Lucca joined the anti-Papal League unconditionally as soon as they realised that refusal to join would have dire consequences. But neither city actually rebelled against the Pope, nor held very closely to Florence. Catherine was disap-

pointed but not cast down. When about to yield to discouragement she would hear within her soul the solemn promise: 'This sweet and holy bride shall live for ever'. Florence could do no harm to the Church. The anti-Papal League and the war certainly presented grave dangers, but they could not destroy what was eternal, and the Church is eternal.

On the other hand, there were far more threatening evils already on the horizon—still far away, but soon to be at hand. Schism itself was imminent. Fra Raimondo asserts that Catherine always feared it, but his desire to represent her as a prophetess leads him into exaggeration. Our information all goes to prove that although Catherine knew that the evils threatening the Church were growing more powerful, she still had no clear idea of the possibility of schism.

Fra Raimondo received the news of the revolt of Perugia about the 22nd of December, 1375. At once, he ran in great distress to Catherine, who was then staying in a hospice near his monastery, to give her the sad news, and decide what they should do. He was upset and agitated at the thought of the dreadful effects these events might have on the temporal power of the Holy See and on the prestige of the Church, which was now at stake. He wept desperately as he related what had happened, and Catherine listened coldly. All at once she turned to him, saying: 'It is too soon to weep—this is nothing but the beginning; what is happening now is honey and milk to what will happen later'. Raimondo was astounded to see her indifference in the face of such terrible happenings. To him the fall of the temporal power, which seemed imminent, meant disaster for the Church. States were defying the Papacy, rebelling against the Holy See, reckless of excommunications—what could be worse? But Catherine's thought were of a loftier order. In those days she was meditating profoundly on the moral evils of the Church, and considering how widespread they were, and how ruinous. And since the corruption of the clergy must be extirpated, she knew already that a drastic reform would bring about quarrels and revolts in the Church itself. The thought of real and actual schism was still far from her mind.

Against a reforming Pope, and God was sure to send one, the first to revolt would naturally be the Cardinals and high ecclesias-

tics, because of their immorality; therefore she could easily foresee that there would ensue 'a great scandal for all Europe, and the whole Church of Christ would groan under it'. This for her was the future danger for Christendom, and before it the importance of the little Florentine war, and the limited and wavering rebellion of Central Italy against the Pope, fell into the background.

Fra Raimondo's amazement passed all bounds; he could not comprehend her dispassionate way of judging; but she understood the anxious and disconsolate soul of her director and friend, and tried to encourage him, pointing out that life is made up of contrasts: 'through what is contrary to virtue we acquire virtue', from shadows comes forth the light, from death comes life, from evil good; this is an inevitable law, and just as the soul 'in adversities achieves perfection without knowing it', so it is also with states, with the Church, with all mankind. Fra Raimondo is lost in preoccupations about material things. He must gather his strength together, re-enter his own soul, and prepare to fight the evil in the world. He belongs to the militia of Christ: therefore his task is to save souls, without caring about worldly matters, and detaching himself from all earthly ties. He has one duty only: to look to Christ, and work so that 'the sweet and holy bride of Christ shall live for ever' on earth.

Catherine left Pisa to go back to Siena towards the end of 1375. In her own city she found her Family. To be re-united to them, surrounded by their affection, able once more to raise and guide them in the ways of God, gave her joy—but it was a somewhat narrow field of activity for her now that she was used to dealing with folk in high position, and giving advice about the affairs and conduct of states. Moreover, she was unhappy in Siena because on November 27th the city had joined the anti-Papal League. These days were therefore days of inner concentration, meditation, grief, prayer and apostolate.

The conversion of Stefano Maconi occurred about this time. He was an elegant and accomplished young noble, of the same age as Catherine, and a boyhood friend of Tommaso da Siena. When he first met Catherine he took no interest in religion or the Saints. His character was mild, and he grieved over the feud between his family and the Tolomei and Rinaldini, and would willingly have made peace. But the Tolomei and Rinaldini refused to consider

any peace proposals. Stefano needed affection and was disconsolate when it failed him. He was kind and sensitive, and sought understanding and serenity. He took pleasure in the various forms of entertainment of that day, and rejoiced in his friendships. His qualities of practical wisdom, sound judgment, and easy eloquence brought him success, first in secular office, and, in later life, in various religious charges. All his life he was very constant in his loves, and never wavered in loyalty to his relatives, his friends, Catherine, and the Order of St Bruno, while he consistently opposed the anti-Popes and the schismatics. When he became General of the Urbanite Carthusians, 'he tried to re-establish unity in his Order' and in the whole Church. In her letters to him Catherine often exhorted him to have more manliness and more ardour of soul; his own letters reveal him as neither a vigorous writer nor a man of strongly-marked personality; all his thoughts were pervaded with a certain melancholy, which in the end found peace in the practice of humility and the love of God.

Until the beginning of 1376 he knew scarcely anything about Catherine. Her fame was generally known in Siena and throughout Tuscany, and his friends and acquaintances had certainly spoken to him of her extraordinary spiritual powers—but he was not then interested in spiritual greatness. His main preoccupation was the hatred borne by the Tolomei towards himself and all his house, and the problem of how to placate it, or seek reconciliation. He asked his friends for advice and support, but in vain. Finally someone advised him to go to Catherine, and his friend Pietro Bellanti, whom Catherine had already reconciled to his own enemies, offered to take him to see her. Maconi expected to find a woman ascetic, quick to judge and rebuke, rigid and scrupulous, with a forbidding manner. Instead, he found himself talking to a serene, frank woman, friendly and impulsive, from whom there seemed to flow a tide of warm affection that engulfed him. Catherine welcomed him with open arms as if he were a brother come from a far land, in need of the enthusiasm and the help of a beloved sister. He was touched and fascinated; he listened reverently to her words and left her presence rejoicing. She had promised him all the peace he desired, and had said she would take all his trouble upon herself; in return he must confess, become virtuous, raise himself to God. She asked nothing more of him.

Maconi must have thought to himself that Saints and miracles were real after all—nevertheless, a slight doubt may have lingered in his mind. She had made him a joyful promise: could it be fulfilled? And very soon he had a striking proof of her power. 'Events proved the truth of the virgin's words, because, through her mediation, I made peace with my enemies, who first resisted with all their might, and then had to yield to Catherine's will, and the force of her prayer; one may indeed call it a miraculous peace.' This was exterior peace, and was not enough for Catherine—not enough for Maconi, either, for he returned to visit the Saint, and felt his inner life gradually transformed. Catherine, who had read his soul and understood the natural goodness of his character, first begged him to act as her secretary, and later took him with her to Avignon, and kept him with her in Florence.

In 1379 he joined her in Rome, and stayed there till her death. All his life he was devoted to her; it was at the behest of his dear Mother that he became a Carthusian. He translated the 'Dialogue' into Latin, and always remained a loyal Urbanite both as a simple Carthusian and as General of the Order. Reverently collecting all Catherine's letters, and diffusing a knowledge of her various writings, he did all he could to increase her fame. After her death his affectionate heart turned to his fellow Caterinati, especially to Pagliaresi, whose fine poetry he admired. Towards the end of his life, detaching himself more and more from the things of this world, he tried to live in communion with Christ, and with his thoughts fixed on Catherine he longed to be re-united with her. 'Our Holy Mother waits for us, and calls us, so that we may arrive quickly, leaving the dead to bury their dead, while in all virtue we follow Jesus Crucified.'

In the midst of her apostolic labours Catherine continued to meditate over the evils that beset the Church, the uncertainties of the time, and the need for prompt reform. Her experiences in Pisa and Lucca had convinced her that the reform must begin with the Papacy itself. Then it would be easy for the Pope to reform the rest of Christendom. Until now she had been warning the children of the Church, a warning which was needed but not sufficient, since so many troubles were due to the Father himself. She now resolutely turned to him, revealing to him the extent and profundity of the ills that were undermining the Church, and

begging him to apply the needful remedies, that were in his power. She wrote directly to the Pope, frankly and clearly. We find again the same observations and criticisms that were contained in the epistle to the Abbot of Lézat, though now they are worded with more reverence. We hear the bell tolling, but also the warrior's bugle-cry—words of dread and loathing, others that console and exalt. Sometimes Catherine seems to bow herself to the dust, then all at once she raises her head high, with the dignity and authority of a prophet. She feels herself to be nothing, but a nothing that has found its all in God, and therefore can judge, warn and command. The safety and greatness of the Pope and the Church depend on the clergy renouncing their selfishness, luxury and corruption. Fire and the sword are needed to cure and heal: 'If the wound is neither burnt with fire nor cut with the sword, but only smeared with ointment, not only will it never heal but it will go rotten, and will often result in death'.

Direct and certain means must be used against the evil that is destroying the Church: 'Alas! Alas! my sweet father, this is the reason why your subjects are all corrupt, full of impurity and wickedness, alas! (I say it weeping) how dangerous is this canker worm!' He himself, the Father of all Christians, must first give up all selfishness, and immoderate affection for his own relations and friends, and attachment to things of this world; he must imitate Pope Gregory the Great, a man like himself, but who thought only of the good of souls, and loved God not for his own sake but for God's. He must follow after spiritual things, and then temporal things would not fail him. The sacred fire within him must destroy that other fire of selfishness and all other passions. He was the Vicar of Christ and must follow manfully in His footsteps. He must first purify himself, and then set about cleansing the Church. 'Do not be perturbed because cities and states rebel against you and the Florentines wage war on you. Do not be afraid of anything that may happen in this stormy weather that has fallen upon you, that is, do not fear these rotten members that have rebelled against you. Fear nought, for divine aid is at hand.' He must choose Cardinals, bishops and priests of unblemished character and profound spirituality, unlike those he had recently appointed, and he must straightway declare the Crusade, for which all Christians must be ready to give their lives. In fact, the

Crusade should be the kernel of his politics: 'Make peace with those who rebel and fight against you, invite them all to a holy peace, so that the whole force of the war may fall upon the infidels'. He must come among his faithful in Italy: 'Come, come now to console the poor little servants of God, your children. They wait for you with affectionate and loving desire.' She tells him about her own efforts to hold back Pisa and Lucca from joining the League at the instigation of Florence, and explains how threatening the future appears. She begs him to write to the two Republics at once, and give them all the encouragement and strength he can.

When Gregory XI received this letter he must have admired Catherine's frankness, her love for the Church and her profound faith. He liked to be told the truth, knowing that almost everyone tried to hide it from him. When he was informed of the revolt of Viterbo and Perugia he exclaimed: 'I never found anyone who would tell me the truth, except the Lombards'. Now Catherine's frank letter came to please and console him. He believed in the revelations of the Saints and admitted the superiority of mystics, and therefore her words had a special weight with him, and perhaps strengthened his own purpose to return to Italy and reform the Church. Catherine was right in indicating the weakness of the Papacy, and in demanding a remedy; but as a political counsellor she was ingenuous. He also wanted to return to Italy, and had long proclaimed this desire to the whole Christian world; he also desired the Crusade, and had issued Bulls to that end; he also hoped to reform the clergy and the Church, and had already made some attempts in that direction; but these were great problems that could not be solved from one moment to another.

How was it possible to proclaim an immediate Crusade? Any war, even a holy war, must be planned psychologically, financially, politically, in every smallest detail, to avoid a disaster like that of the Second Crusade, inspired by St Bernard. To go campaigning in the Holy Land required a great expenditure of money, many ships, well-trained armies and the co-operation of rich and powerful peoples. Catherine knew only of what was happening in her own neighbourhood, and even if she could count on some thousands of Italian Crusaders, ready to fight the infidels, they were not, as Gregory had been informed, of great military worth.

It was ingenuous on her part to think that if the Pope offered peace to his enemies, they would at once flock to fight for the 'holy expedition'. His return to Italy, also, although right and necessary, was not a thing that could be done in a hurry. As Pope he had obligations, not only towards Italy, but towards the whole of Europe, and he could not in that moment leave France and Italy to tear each other to pieces, without trying to intervene as a peacemaker. However, Catherine was a real Saint, and it behoved him to take some notice of her words; she was eloquent and profoundly religious. Her exhortations were inspired and full of persuasive power. In very truth she was of service to the cause of Christ and could be of even greater service in the future. We can guess that these thoughts were in Gregory's mind, but whether or not he replied to Catherine's letter we do not know.

Meanwhile, believing that Gregory XI was a weak man, as was commonly supposed among the Dominicans of her group, Catherine persevered with her requests and warnings to the Pope, writing to two great personages of the Curia: Nicola 'de Romanis' da Osimo, proto-notary and secretary to the Pope, and Jacopo da Itri, the Archbishop of Otranto, whom she knew personally, and who had informed the Caterinati of the imminent return of the Pope to Italy, and of the beginning of the 'holy expedition'. After appealing to both of them to cleanse themselves in the Blood of Christ, to be full of virtue, and willing to sacrifice all for the cause of God, she repeated, more or less, the same ideas she had expressed to the Pope: they must persuade him to return as soon as possible to Italy, make the Crusade a reality, and reform the clergy.

Meanwhile, she received disquieting news from Lucca—the city had decided to join the anti-Papal League. Great was her disappointment. She had always been a bit doubtful about the Lucchesi—but she had entertained some hopes of the success of her own mission among them; now all seemed lost. She wrote to the Elders a letter, mostly a sermon on human blindness, in which she insisted on the immortality of the Church, which is eternal and indestructible because God gives her light and power. Then she appealed directly to the Lucchesi: 'My very dear brothers, and sons of Holy Church', to urge them to persevere in loyalty to the Pope, and to refuse to follow those devils the

Florentines, who would lead them to damnation. Until now, she says, they have been strong and persevering and obedient to Holy Church, and she has rejoiced at this: but 'now, hearing the contrary, I am greatly cast down'. She warns them that although they say they take this step for the sake of peace, they will find the greatest war and ruin that they ever had—for body and soul. 'Now do not be guilty of such ignorance, but be true sons and persevering. You will know that if the Father has many sons he will leave his inheritance only to the one who remains faithful to him.' Returning to the initial theme of her letter, she says: 'Man is a blind man, needing the light, and the light is Christ. We must therefore go in search of this light, and I pray the supreme eternal Truth to fill and robe your soul with light, so that I shall not be afraid of your doing the contrary of what I now pray and order you to do in Christ's name, that is, to act otherwise in the future from the way you have acted in the past.' Her letter and appeal apparently were of no avail; but Catherine had the satisfaction of knowing she had done what God required of her. She had reminded the Elders of Lucca of their Christian conscience, and of their duty as sons of the Church.

This was a period of great sadness for Catherine. Things were not turning out as she had hoped. She meditated on all this, seeking for the cause, and found it in herself. She was the guilty one; because of her sins there was so much evil in the world: 'have mercy on my wickedness, my dear daughters, that is the cause of all the evil done in the world, and especially of offences against the sweet bride of Christ', she wrote to her Sieneſe Tertiaries, perhaps after an unsuccessful visit to the Elders of Lucca. It was a moment of disappointment and grief. She had failed in her intent, and God had withheld His aid because she had not the faith that moves mountains; the fault was therefore hers alone. She was lacking in faith because she was not pure enough; she was a sinner, still far from God. She must make a greater sacrifice of herself, a more complete cleansing and drowning in the Blood of Christ.

When a mystic believes himself guilty of all the evil in the world, he has risen above the universe and is, as it were, on the farthest rim of a circle whose centre is God. The light of life proceeds from God, but passes through him, and so when he sees

outside the circle nothing but darkness he blames his own soul for hindering the light from shining to illuminate the whole world. Such a thought might become an obsession and lead to despair; but the mystics remain serene, because almost immediately afterwards they are again aware of the light and life within their own souls, made transparent and luminous through divine action. So their optimism and joy return: 'I am sure, and I comfort myself with this, that His Providence will not fail. And already I seem to see His Providence beginning to appear.' Thus, serene and confident, Catherine took up her task again.

One of her women disciples wrote to her from Lucca saying she was grieving because her sweet Mother had left the city. Catherine answered at once, rebuking her for her attachment to creatures: 'I do not wish you to have love for me, or for any creatures, but only for God'. She must consider the life of Christ. Did He not abandon all He held most dear on earth to save mankind? Detachment from peoples and things is the first duty of the pilgrim in spiritual life. Therefore she must not feel the need of Catherine's bodily presence. 'Now I want you and the others to love me in this wise. Think of me only to give the glory to God, and give your service to your neighbours.' She herself was but an instrument in the hands of her Creator, and her work must be praised or condemned according to His purpose. They must turn to the Cross, by which she stood. 'Only there must you look for me, and for any other creature.' It was a good thing that she had left them, for otherwise they might not have sought for God alone, but might have clung too closely to her person, at the cost of their own perfection. However, they must not doubt her love. 'Do not think that because my body goes away from you, my affection and solicitude for your salvation grow less; for rather they increase when I am absent from you.'

To Bartolomea di Salvatico, also a Lucchese, and a recent convert, she writes to confirm her in the three fundamental Christian virtues: hatred for sin, love, through the grace of Christ, for all creatures and created things, patience to endure all hardship and pain. To possess these three virtues is to possess God, and whoever has God 'can feel no bitterness, for He is supreme delight, sweetness and joy. And that is the reason why the servants of God ever rejoice.' And she advises her to follow the Magdalene, the teacher

of all the faithful, who had no thought for herself, but wished wholly to follow Christ.

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Meanwhile, the quarrel between Florence and the Papacy was growing more bitter and dangerous. Today it is easy to accuse the Florentines of a lack of political judgment in under-estimating the power of the Holy See. In fact, the knowledge of their own intellectual and material superiority, and the pride this knowledge gave them, prevented the Florentines from estimating correctly their own powers of resistance to the Papacy. They were full of self-confidence, supreme in art and letters, sure and proud of the great wealth they had amassed by their industry and commerce, clever in business, showing great talent in a variety of professions, easy and eloquent orators—why should they not aim at leadership in Italy? Did they not, more than any other state, deserve the political overlordship? But their ambition was opposed by the Papacy, and therefore they began subtly to undermine the Papal power, believing that, as soon as the temporal power of the Church collapsed, Florence would be able, directly or indirectly, to govern the greater part of central Italy.

The achievement of this purpose, that they saw ever more clearly before them, required careful planning to ensure their success. They began by exaggerating the weaknesses of the Papal government, and the ill deeds of the Legates, and exploiting the frictions and disagreements between the people and clergy, and they incited the Papal lands to revolt, and tried to mobilise Princes and states against the Papacy. The innate irony of the Florentines had plenty of scope, for the high ecclesiastics presented a good target for ridicule and mockery. With deliberate cunning they fanned into a blaze the discontent that was already smouldering, and offered help to all and sundry, promising independence and liberty. In the Romagna, in Umbria, the Marches and Tuscany, the Florentines already formed a sort of camouflaged army, or 'fifth column', ready to rise against the Legates and fight them resolutely when the hour for action came. Thus in central Italy the policy of Florence seemed triumphant, and she rejoiced when she heard of unrest, revolts and insurrections against the Papacy.

These men of the City of the Lily acted guilefully and with

subtle tact. They never came out into the open, for they did not wish to be accused of inciting the Papal cities to rebellion for their own ends. They did not declare themselves anti-religious, or anti-Papal, but proclaimed their desire to oppose ecclesiastical policy, as being a policy of Frenchmen for Frenchmen, and therefore alien and harmful to the Italian states. They tried to initiate a nationalist movement that might even include the Church. It does not seem likely that they contemplated setting up a National Church, as Dupré-Théseider seems inclined to believe. Writing about this in his book on the Popes of Avignon, he bases his conjecture on the writings of Marsili, who certainly refers to such a plan, but without much support from other Tuscan historians.

Then came what the Florentines, posing as victims, thought an opportune moment to attack the Papacy with precise accusations. The Pope had refused to send the corn which Florence needed; the Legate of Bologna had sent Hawkwood to loot and devastate Tuscany to weaken Florence; the ecclesiastics had plotted the betrayal of Prato, as was proved irrefutably by the Treaty which consigned Prato to Hawkwood. The Pope was evidently determined to break the power of Florence and then subdue her with all the rest of Tuscany.

Today historical criticism has dismissed these accusations as false and absurd, but in those days they were on the lips of all, and inflamed the imaginations of the Florentines. While making these open accusations, Florence was also building up a defence system that might (and, in fact, did) at the opportune moment become a means of aggression. She formed an anti-Papal League with Bernabò Visconti, and then with promises or threats induced various Tuscan cities to enter it. She was preparing arms and combatants.

Meanwhile, the Republic received good news: the Papal States were in revolt against their rulers and joining the Florentine League. From November 18th, 1375, with the insurrection of Viterbo, to March 19th, 1376, with the revolt of Bologna, Florence had every reason to exult over the continual defections from Papal rule. The 'great bell to announce a great festivity' rang out frequently, and enormous bonfires were lit amidst general rejoicing.

The temporal power of the Papacy seemed about to collapse.

The prestige and authority of Florence were increasing. What, the Florentines boasted, could the Legates do now, driven out of their cities and fortresses? What could the Pope himself, Gregory XI, do? He was weak and hesitant, and remained in distant Avignon, busied with questions other than that of Italy. It was to the advantage of Florence that he should remain where he was, and gradually accustom himself to the sad reality of the loss of his temporal power; then the astute and powerful Republic might be able to include him within her own political orbit, as a useful instrument of her own power.

This political ambition was but a dream. The Florentines, cold, calculating, wary, mercilessly critical of their own actions and of everybody else's, for once made a mistake. They succeeded in their campaign against the Curia, they knew how to sow hatred against the Pope, and arouse a desire for freedom in the peoples subject to him, they were able to initiate an anti-Papal movement that seemed powerful enough, and form a League of Republics and cities that, at least in the beginning, held firm; but they underestimated the latent strength of the Papacy, a strength that was ready for active intervention. Misunderstanding the character of Gregory XI, they also mistook the intentions of foreign states; they did not propitiate the Emperor and they did not smooth out their own internal divisions. All these mistakes became evident as soon as Gregory XI began to act in his own defence, and they proved the cause of their final disaster. One must admit that the Pope was patient for many months. Instead of taking vigorous action, he tried persuasion. In his numerous Bulls he explained, humbly requested, almost apologised. He counselled obedience, invoked unity, submission, peace. He asked the Legates to punish the officials who were guilty of maladministration; he wanted to come to an agreement with his subject peoples, and invited them to wait for his return to Italy in the near future, when he himself would see that they were dealt with justly. All this was a subject of mirth for the Florentines, and they went on more boldly than ever with their work of undermining Papal prestige and feeding the revolt. But towards the end of 1375 Gregory XI changed his attitude and became harsh and severe; in the last days of December he accused the Florentines of usury, and declared they were fomenting rebellion in the Papal States. He imposed a fine of

thirty thousand francs on the Florentine merchants residing in Avignon. Florence protested and intensified her opposition. Gregory remained firm: the levy was paid. Meanwhile the Pope collected funds for the war, now imminent, and opened negotiations to take the Company of Breton Mercenaries into his pay.

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Queen Giovanna of Naples and the Republic of Genoa, wishing to relieve the tension, sent ambassadors to Florence with proposals for peace, which the Signoria refused. On February 11th, 1376, Gregory solemnly accused the Florentines and ordered the Signoria to appear for trial in Avignon on March 31st. The Signoria showed no sign of wavering or fear, but with characteristic astuteness, while still continuing their adverse propaganda, they sent letters to the Pope, before the trial began, recommending the representatives they sent to defend them, and appealing for his clemency; they wrote also to the College of Cardinals to remind them of their 'ancient and uninterrupted devotion and affection for the Church', and to Cardinal Corsini of Florence to beg him to speak in favour of his own city, and 'not make himself guilty of ingratitude towards his native land', and to other Cardinals, Religious and rulers, asking them to defend the Florentines before the Pope. They professed themselves devoted children of the Church and of the Pope, and declared that Gregory's misunderstanding of them was due to the false and wicked accusations which envious minds had poured into his ears; they attributed the responsibility for the insurrections in the Papal States to the ecclesiastical officials, whom they described as: '*oculi et cor ad avariciam et ad sanguinem innocentem effundendum et ad cursum mali operis*'. The Pope was unmoved; on the 31st of March he had the accusations read out in the Consistorial Court. The defenders of Florence did all they could to deny these accusations; but their eloquence and their arguments fell to the ground. All their attempts to avoid excommunication failed. The Pope, tired of the hostile activity of Florence, wanted to make an end, and demanded an exemplary punishment. The condemnation was solemnly read: excommunication, Interdict, confiscation of wealth. The Florentines were to be shunned, and their house

burnt. The city was outlawed; the property of the citizens was anyone's prize. A sentence to strike fear into the heart! The power and wealth of Florence were to wither in a spiritual, moral, economic and financial desert. The defenders of the Republic must have trembled with apprehension. It is said that the eloquent orator Barbadoro, once he realised their cause was hopeless, appealed to the Crucified for justice and help, against the injustice of His Vicar on earth, and this appeal, although rhetorical and bombastic, showed his concern and fear for the future of his country.

Florence now began to feel some difficulty and opposition. The Emperor ordered her to cease from stirring up rebellion in the Papal States; Naples opposed her instead of coming to her aid; neither Venice nor Genoa would support her openly; Rome refused to join the League; Hungary was hostile. Bernabò Visconti, her greatest ally, helped her as little as he could, 'to spare Lombardy the evils of war, and, to his own advantage, to let the full burden of the war fall on the Republic'.

Even the members of the League began to weaken. As Mirot says: 'Each ally aimed at increasing his own territory before his neighbour could seize land they both coveted. Each thought of his own defence, and Florence had not sufficient authority to compel private rivalries to give place to the common interest. The League broke asunder almost as soon as it was formed. From the day on which the Pope announced his return, and declared Florence to be beyond the pale of Christendom, the Florentines could count defections from the League as rapidly as before they had counted the adherences.'

Internal dissensions were now formidable. The 'war' party had not realised that from the very beginning it should have weakened the 'peace' party, that of the Guelphs. This party was so strong that 'while the Signoria were conducting hostilities against the Pope, they could not defend themselves against the Party Captains, and their followers', 'because', adds Machiavelli, echoing the Chronicles of that time, 'in the Party the Captains were so arrogant that they were held in more reverence than the rulers themselves; so much so that no ambassador came to Florence without having a mission to the Captains'.

How could Florence, amid such uncertainties and hostilities,

and with the prospect of economic disaster before her, hope to obtain a victory over the Pope, who had powerful spiritual forces at his disposal, was defended by the Emperor and various foreign states, and was moreover, everywhere supported by thousands of priests and friars?

At this dramatic moment Catherine came into contact with the rulers of the Florentine Republic. In January or February of 1376 she had written to her friend Niccolò Soderini, who had been elected Prior for those two months. It should have been a letter of congratulation, but it was one of warning instead. Catherine is absorbed in the thought of the anti-Papal League which in those days seemed very formidable, and a great deal of this letter may be said to consist of variations on the theme: '*Lega, legare, legami, legato*', words which she repeats more than twenty times. Now that Soderini is one of the Rulers, he must help his fellow citizens to bind themselves to Christ, and hence also to His Vicar on earth, for Church and Christ are one. What are these dreams of Florentine greatness, and this fear of losing power? 'We are fools, for we ruin ourselves through our lust for greatness, and, for fear of losing our position, we take on and do the devil's work, inviting other creatures to do the same evil things that we do ourselves, like the devil himself, for when they were angels, those that fell bound themselves together and rebelled against God, and through their desire to climb higher fell lower.' They were mistaken in thinking they had been attacked by the Pope; instead, it was they who had attacked him; nevertheless, he was such a kind father that he not only forgave them but invited them to make peace. They were to go to him and bind themselves to him with manly and virtuous hearts, if they wished to share in the Blood of Christ. They must strive for peace. 'Try to make peace and union between yourselves and Holy Church, to save yourselves from dire peril, you and all Tuscany with you. Methinks war is not so sweet that we must all needs accept it, if there is any way out of it. Is there anything sweeter than peace? To be sure, no!'

This letter must have shaken and moved Soderini, arousing in him feelings and thoughts that were latent, if dormant, in his soul. But it was not yet the right moment to show his own mind. Just then all seemed still to favour the Republic, the Signoria were continually victorious, the power of Florence was increasing,

enthusiasm for the war had now spread among the people, and anyone who spoke in favour of peace was considered a traitor. Only when Florence was plunged under the Interdict and excommunication, and the first baneful effects of these were felt, only then did the Guelph party begin to work more insistently in favour of peace. Perhaps Soderini then remembered Catherine's letter. She had spoken of the Pope as a kind father who would invite them to make peace. Peace had now become a mirage for many, and every day more necessary for Florence, as more and more people had begun to understand. But who could take the first steps to bring about a reconciliation with the Pope without compromising the Government of the city? Why not Catherine? She enjoyed the Pope's esteem and corresponded with him. It would be well to invite her, and to make use of her mediations. She was a Saint, and therefore more able to save Florence than anyone else. The letter Soderini had received from her was perhaps of good omen. Perhaps he spoke of her to his friends in the Party, or to some of the Priors.

This would fit in with Fra Raimondo's assertion that, when the Florentines began to feel the economic effects of the Interdict, 'they were obliged to seek peace with the Pope through the agency of people who they knew were acceptable to him. They were told that the holy virgin, whose sanctity was known to him, was high in his favour.' Soderini may also have spoken of Catherine with the Dominicans of Santa Maria Novella, who were in close touch with the Guelph Party, and so there may have been a group of people in authority, anxious to make peace with the Church, who considered Catherine to be the most suitable person to beg Gregory XI to use mildness and clemency in his dealings with Florence. It was urgently necessary to put a stop to the economic ruin now threatening, and to spare the city further evils. It was thought best to send the Pope, in Catherine's name, a trustworthy person who could explain to him the circumstances in which the Florentines found themselves, and the Saint's own wishes—and who could be better fitted for this mission than Raimondo da Capua, an intimate friend of Catherine's, much esteemed in his Order, and highly thought of also in the Curia? So Fra Raimondo was sent as unofficial ambassador to Avignon. In Catherine's name he was to appeal to the Pope's compassion, and prepare the ground

for a possible future reconciliation. Fra Raimondo writes: 'They ordered me first of all to go to the Pope on behalf of Catherine, to endeavour to mitigate his wrath'. We infer that he was sent by the heads of the Guelph Party, in agreement with the Dominicans. The Party constituted a state within the state, and had the power and authority to send Fra Raimondo to the Pope on a special mission of importance for Florence, without however pledging the city directly by deeds or words.

Catherine heard all about this, and gave her consent. Her letters often show her desire to see the Pope and speak to him, and she may have thought that this would be a propitious time to do so. Fra Raimondo would present himself to Gregory XI in her name, and the Pope might perhaps ask to see her. When her spiritual director, accompanied by Fra Giovanni Terzo, Fra Felice da Massa and others, left for Avignon at the end of March, he carried with him a letter from Catherine presenting and recommending him to the Pope.

This letter sought, indirectly, to further peace between Florence and the Holy See. The Pope must be 'the instrument and cause, through divine grace, of the pacification of the whole world', but he could achieve this only by reforming the clergy, returning to Rome, and preaching the Crusade. These are the three recurrent themes of all her letters, but in this one her language is more vigorous than in the preceding letters, and denotes her growing scorn of those prelates who are 'stinking weeds, full of impurity and greed, swollen with pride', who must be uprooted, because they 'poison and befoul' the garden of the Church. Her thoughts turn wistfully to the primitive Church. Perhaps these rebellions and defections are a means of recalling the Church to its pure origins. Perhaps God had desired this war 'so that Holy Church might return to her former poverty, and be meek and humble as she was in that holy time, when, caring for nought but the glory of God and the salvation of souls, she occupied herself with spiritual and not with temporal matters—for since she had begun to care more for temporal than for spiritual things, all has gone from bad to worse'.

These are not mere echoes of Franciscan thought, so widely diffused at that time, but are also spontaneous and direct judgments of her own. She esteemed and counselled poverty, but,

unlike St Francis, never made it the absolute centre of life. She admired the primitive Church but did not consider it was necessary to return to its practice, as the more or less Protestant reformers insisted later on. She believed the Church must purify herself, and become more spiritually minded, but she did not deny her historical evolution. The revolts and wars of her own day were due to moral causes; the real teaching of the Church had been neglected or destroyed because wicked ministers had so sucked her blood that 'she had become quite pale'; the Pope must therefore take wide, comprehensive and energetic action, so as to bring about 'a great peace out of war, and a great concord out of persecution'. He must not be enraged because of the recent insurrection of Bologna, and he must not desist from his purposes of peace; she, Catherine, was hard at work putting things to rights. She wrote confidently to the Pope: 'those fierce wolves'—the Florentines—'will put their heads in your lap like meek lambs, and beg for your mercy'.

A few weeks later she wrote again to Gregory XI, repeating her appeal, and defending the Florentines more warmly than ever, imploring him to forgive them. The phrase: 'I know that all agree that they have behaved badly', and her persistence in accusing the corrupt ministers of the Church of being the direct cause of the war, lead us to suppose that she had been in consultation with the leaders of the Guelph Party. It is as if she were repeating accusations she had heard in the mouths of Florentines—but she gives them a spiritual, not a political significance.

Anger and war do not work the salvation of men, she wrote to the Pope. Only love and mercy can save them. Christ acknowledged this when He came down to earth, and you, His Vicar-on-earth, must acknowledge this too. 'O my most holy and sweet Father, I see no other remedy and no other way to win back again your little sheep, that have run away like rebels from the fold of Holy Church, like disobedient rebels to you, Father. So I pray you, in the name of Christ Crucified, and I beg you to grant me this boon—to conquer their malice with your kindness.' He must love and forgive, and he would see the grateful Florentines defending the cause of Christ. They would become Crusaders, she was sure of it; they had assured her they were 'ready to give their lives for Christ'.

Catherine had not realised she was dealing with politicians who were ready to promise everything to achieve their own purpose. They had understood that the Crusade was her darling project, and so they glibly assured her that Florence would take part in the Crusade as soon as peace was made with the Pope. This promise had the effect of increasing her efforts in pleading their cause—which was all they wanted. Catherine is afire with enthusiasm as soon as she writes of the Crusade: 'Raise the standard of the most holy Cross, Father, and you will see the wolves become lambs. Peace! Peace! Peace!' She has a moment's doubt; will the Pope accept her advice? He has suffered such injuries that he must have justice, must even have just retribution; but there is a way out for all: she is willing to be the expiatory victim. 'But if you wish to have vengeance and justice, visit these on me, wretched and miserable as I am, and give me all the punishments and pains you wish, even to death. I believe that the scandal of my own iniquities has caused many defections, and grave troubles and quarrels. Therefore, wreak on me, your wretched daughter, whatever vengeance you will. Alas! Father, I die of grief and yet cannot die.'

However much Gregory XI admired her outburst of love and her spirit of self-sacrifice, he must have reflected somewhat ruefully that wars cannot be terminated in this way, nor political quarrels smoothed out. Catherine, meanwhile, more and more enthusiastic for her own ideas, insisted that at all costs peace must be signed between Florence and the Pope, because only after this could the Crusade be proclaimed.

On the first of April she had a vision that she describes, with great joy, in a letter to Raimondo da Capua. The Primal Truth told her that the purpose of the present persecution was the renewal and exaltation of the Church, and that as Christ scourged the merchants in the Temple and drove them out, so the venal and corrupt prelates were now scourged by persecution, and, in the future, would be driven out of the Church, so that the Church might become pure again. Her desire took on a vivid form in this vision. She saw Christians and infidels enter the wounded side of Christ, and among them she saw herself accompanied by St John the Evangelist, and St Dominic. Then Christ laid the Cross on her shoulders, and put in her hands an olive branch to offer to Christians and infidels. Catherine rejoiced, seeing the whole world con-

verted to Christ, and at peace for ever. What more could she desire? Her dream had become reality, and her task here below was completed; now at last she might die: 'I languish with this desire'.

She was certain that this was a prophetic vision—her will fastened itself still more closely to her purpose—the world (that is, Florence and the Papacy, for other European peoples and their wars did not interest her) must be reconciled, the Pope must return to Rome, and the Crusade must be proclaimed. She herself would be the means of achieving all this: so her vision had assured her.

The Easter of the Resurrection of Christ was at hand—a time of peace. The Signoria must make peace with the Pope. She wrote to them: 'And so I desire, with very great longing, to see you behave as true children and not as rebels against your Father, not turning your backs on the testament of peace, but seekers after peace, bound together and united in the bond and love of burning charity'. If they wished to continue in their revolt and war against the Pope they would be ungrateful and impious children. 'I wish to celebrate Easter with you, an Easter of reconciliation, so that you may be peaceful children, not rebellious against your head, but obedient subjects even unto death. You well know that Christ left us His Vicar, and left him as a remedy for our souls; we can have no health outside the Mystical Body of Holy Church, whose Head is Christ, and we are His members; and he who disobeys Christ-on-earth, who stands in the place of Christ-in-Heaven, shall have no share in the Blood of the Son of God.' They had persecuted the Vicar of Christ; therefore 'you have fallen into death and hatred, and into God's displeasure'. How could they be raised up again? They proffered excuses which were worthless. They accused the prelates, the rulers of the Church, representing them as wicked monsters; she also admitted that individually there were bad shepherds, but what of that? Has God not commanded that even if the Pope and the rulers of the Church were devils incarnate, we should still owe them obedience? Obedience 'not to them as themselves, but, through obedience to Christ, as Vicars of Christ, who command us to do this'. Instead of wasting themselves in this unworthy war, they should spend their energies in greater causes; instead of massacring other Christians, and

rebellling against their head, they should humiliate themselves devoutly before him; then, out with their swords against the infidels! 'Arise and run to the arms of your Father, who will receive you kindly if you will but do so, and you will have peace and repose spiritually and temporally, you and the whole of Tuscany, for when the standard of the Holy Cross is raised the whole weight of the war will fall upon the infidels, and if you do not set out now to make a good peace, you will have a worse time, for you and all Tuscany, than ever our fathers had. I tell you all this because I love you and suffer for your present misery, and I am ready to do all I can for you, and I do so joyfully; do you wish me to help you? It would be well to see each other and to speak. My love for you and my grief for your present trouble would more easily be expressed by word of mouth than in a letter. If through my means anything can be obtained, for the glory of God, and the reconciliation of you and Holy Church, I am disposed to give my life, if need be.'

This offer of mediation must have pleased the Signoria. There were among them some already anxious for peace, and others who would have done anything to avoid the consequences of the Interdict, now painfully evident. As she had offered her services, she might be of use to them. In any case, she could be a means of gaining time, and calming the Papal indignation. In Avignon at that time was the Company of Breton Mercenaries, a great source of anxiety—they were fifteen hundred lancers, and eight thousand armed men. If they were to march against Florence the city would be in grave danger, but the Saint might beg the Pope to postpone their departure. When all was taken into consideration, Catherine's offer was worth accepting.

We do not know whether Catherine was already in Florence when she wrote to the Signoria. The vision took place in Siena, and she probably wrote to them from her own city. Some of the Signoria, with some Guelph friends, probably invited her there. Possibly Fra Raimondo is right when he says the Priors issued forth from one of the gates of Florence to meet her; probably, however, it was not the Priors themselves, but persons in authority, and perhaps some ex-Priors. Certainly there was a meeting, official or not, and one sees why it was considered necessary. The discontent with the war felt by some sections of the Florentine

populace, the hardships caused by the excommunication and Interdict, the spectre of commercial failure and bankruptcy, the defection of some cities from the League, the hostility of the rest of Europe, must have persuaded the rulers of the Republic to avail themselves of the help of anyone who might be able to come to their assistance. Catherine was a holy woman and corresponded with the Pope; she might easily assuage his anger and persuade him to be merciful, and so might help to create an atmosphere more favourable to future negotiations. If she succeeded in her preparatory work, the real ambassadors could at once be sent, and they would more easily then be able to negotiate a peace.

With such intentions before them, the Signoria who interviewed her naturally accepted all her demands. Catherine wanted the Florentines to prostrate themselves before the Pope and beg his forgiveness and mercy, so that she could offer them to their Father 'as dead children'. They agreed. She asked for a free hand to treat their cause. They granted this. She demanded that, when peace was made, they should take part in the Crusade. They willingly consented. It cost them nothing to concede, verbally, more than they had the power to give, or even more than they could approve of—since their concessions and promises had no binding power for them, but were expedient at that moment.

As soon as Catherine got to know that after her own departure, the real ambassadors of the Signoria would leave for Avignon, she became a little suspicious, and asked for her 'letter of credentials, to prove that we have conferred together about all this', but they replied that they believed in her alone, and therefore trusted in her only: 'we do not believe that this can be done by any other hand but that of a servant of God'. She was convinced by this reply, which cleverly flattered her religious feelings. Being unused to political skirmishing, she was not on her guard, and therefore the ambiguous meaning of the phrases deliberately used by the statesmen did not arouse her distrust; she did not notice that they were making use of her without in any way pledging their Government's support. She was trustful, believed in men's words, and therefore considered herself an official ambassadress sent by Florence to the Pope, while the Florentines used her merely as a means to procure a more favourable reception by Gregory XI.

Meanwhile, without the slightest doubt about the mission

entrusted to her, Catherine was glad to be going at last to Avignon, to speak with the Pope. After her conversation with the Signoria, she wrote to Gregory XI: 'Methinks the divine goodness is changing the fierce wolves into humble lambs. And so I am coming to you at once to place them in your lap.' Then, taking heart from the fact that the Pope had asked her advice about his return to Italy, she firmly admonished him: 'If the Florentines have given up their pride, and have so humiliated themselves that I can offer them to you, begging for your forgiveness and mercy, you also must give up your self-love and forgive them. You must be manly in forgiving, not held back by any servile fear. Does the good shepherd not set on his shoulder the little sheep he has found, to bear it back to the fold? You must do the same, for I am sure you will receive them as a father, notwithstanding the insults and injuries they have wrought against you.' In this way alone the war would end, and the Pope would be free, and all Christendom with him, to fall upon the infidels.

While she cannot forbear to plead with the Pope for this insistent dream of the Crusade so dear to her heart, yet in her enthusiasm she does not forget the anxious request of the Florentines, that the Pope should keep in Avignon the Breton mercenaries that were to have marched on Florence. 'Those people you have taken into your pay, to send them here, keep them there, and see they do not come, as they would remedy nothing but mar all.'

Then, with a joyful heart, she gathered her strength in God to acquire the necessary energy to fulfil her new and difficult mission. She was happy. She chose those of her disciples that she wished to accompany her on her journey; gave the necessary instructions to her friends and followers, and prepared to set out, fortified by the memory of her prophetic vision.

Chapter VIII

AVIGNON

CATHERINE arrived in Avignon on June 18th, 1376. She brought with her a numerous Family, which was joined by other disciples who were already in the city. They were in all twenty-three heralds of God: a spiritual force capable of converting the world. The city was gay and beautiful, but Catherine disdained it. 'Avignon, la sonneuse de la joie . . .',† the city of the ringing belfries, gave her no joy; she was absorbed in the thought of her approaching colloquy with Gregory XI, and neither saw nor heard anything of her surroundings.

Together with her Family she was lodged, by the Pope's commands, in a beautiful house where, as Maconi tells us, there was a chapel 'beautifully adorned', which probably means covered with frescoes. As soon as she arrived Catherine sent word to Gregory XI that she awaited an audience. Perhaps she sent Pagliaresi to him, armed with a letter that has come down to us, in which no mention was made of any other conversations previously granted her by the Pope, and in which she respectfully requested an interview: 'I would rather tell you this by word of mouth than in writing', she said; then she tactfully alluded to the subject, so dear to his heart, of the return of the Holy See to Rome, and she urged him to make peace between all Christian folk, so as better to be able, later on, to make Christians of the infidels, in holy warfare.

Not many days elapsed before the Pope received her. On June 29th, in a letter to the Eight of the War Party in Florence, she

† 'Avignon, la sonneuse de la joie,
Qui l'une après l'autre, élève les pointes
De ses clochers tout semés de fleurons'

Frédéric Mistral: *Le Poème du Rhône*.

Chant VIII, LXIX: à *Horizon*

informed them that she had already spoken with the Holy Father. This interview was indeed necessary for both to understand each other's endeavours in the pursuit of their common aim.

They admired each other. Gregory believed in Catherine's inspiration and in the revelations she received from God. She believed in his fatherly goodness, unselfishness, modesty, liberality and purity of intention. She was simple and spontaneous, ready to fling herself into any danger for the sake of others; the Pope was thoughtful and careful, instinctively shunning danger. Catherine rose above the world of the senses and implored counsel and guidance from the Infinite; Gregory XI stood squarely on his rights and judged according to law and justice. She was optimistic and full of enthusiasm, but easily deceived, while Gregory, used to political manoeuvres, was distrustful of flatteries and promises, and always wary and reluctant to make a decision.

He was kind to Catherine. She came out of the interview jubilant: 'I have spoken with the Holy Father; through the goodness of God, and his own goodness, he listened to me graciously, showing a fond love for peace; he was like the good father who does not think so much of the wrong his son has done to him, as of the repentance he has shown—so that he may show mercy towards him. My tongue cannot describe the satisfaction he felt.'

As a matter of fact, Catherine had been somewhat disconcerted by certain judgments the Pope had expressed on the Florentines' behaviour, and his declaration that he could not just then proclaim the Crusade, because he had no leader ready to put at the head of it, must have perturbed her considerably. In his presence she had felt unable to contradict him, but afterwards, when she thought it over, it seemed to her that Gregory was not sufficiently strong-willed, and appeared almost to linger contentedly over the obstacles that prevented a rapid and energetic course of action. So she wrote him a letter rather in the style of an inspired judge: 'O my most sweet Father, first of all you have been made Pope to correct all the wickedness that goes on in the Church; and, if you do not feel capable of doing this you should give up the triple crown. Secondly, you must make peace with the Tuscans; punish them as much as they deserve, but make peace with them. Lastly, declare the Crusade without delay. I know well that this seems to you now an impossible thing to do, but it is needful that

you give full authority to those who beg you to be allowed to make this holy expedition. I tell you all this, not on my own behalf, but constrained to do so by the sweet primal Truth. . . . I would willingly have said this to you in person, so as to satisfy my conscience, but I did not do so; so now I write to you instead. However, I am always here, obedient to your command, and when Your Holiness wishes to see me I will come willingly.'

Meanwhile she began to speak with Cardinals, prelates, princes, aristocrats, courtiers, statesmen and clerics, talking to all of Christ, and trying to find in them trusty support for the causes she was defending: 'It is through the grace of our sweet Saviour that we have come here', she wrote to Sano di Pietro.

But various unpleasant rumours from Florence reached her ears: the Signoria had levied a tax on all the clergy. Those who informed Catherine of this were Cardinals favourable to peace, and therefore not a suspect source; it was best, therefore, to write at once to Florence, to the 'Eight of War', to warn them of the ruin they would bring upon themselves if they acted in this way: 'This news of you will spoil all the good seed I have sowed for you'. She was pleading their cause for peace, she told them, and had already spoken with the Pope, who was so well-disposed towards her that when she took her leave he had said that if matters stood thus, as she had described them, he was 'ready to receive you as children and to do with you what seemed best to me'. Could anyone wish for more? They must not be deceitful, therefore, but must show, in word and deed, that they desired peace. If they did otherwise, 'you would bring shame and mockery on me, for nothing but shame and confusion could come of my saying one thing and your doing another'. She ended by saying she was awaiting with confidence their Ambassadors, to come to an agreement with them.

She waited patiently, reflecting sometimes on the Pope's words: 'Believe me, Catherine, the Florentines have deceived you, and will deceive you again; they will not send Ambassadors; or, if they do, their mission will be inconclusive'.

At last the Florentine Ambassadors arrived in Avignon, and Catherine's heart rejoiced. At once she sent for them, to inform them of the excellent results she had obtained in their favour, and to decide with them what steps to take to win the longed-for

peace. But the Ambassadors curtly replied that she had no authority to treat with them; they were accredited to the Pope, not to her. This time Gregory XI had prophesied truly. Catherine realised this at once and acknowledged it. They had deceived her in Florence, and she grieved over this: 'I have felt a great bitterness over this offence to God and injury to yourselves', she wrote to Buonaccorso di Lapo, and she added: 'As the peace between Florence and the Holy See is necessary for the proclamation of the Crusade, I shall continue to do what I can, even unto death, for the honour of God and for your peace, and to remove this obstacle to the sweet holy expedition overseas'.

From that moment she abandoned the Florentine cause; other cares absorbed her, and all her eloquence was employed to induce the Pope to return to Rome, and prepare the Crusade, which had become dearer to her than life itself.

She was not happy in Avignon. The corruption of the city disgusted her. All great capitals are corrupt, but Catherine considered the central seat of the Church should be the home of purity. Instead, it was the abode of luxury, intrigue, scandal, greed and sensuality. Here was no Christian way of life. If she had known Petrarch's lines on Avignon, in his 79th Sonnet—

'De l'empia Babilonia, ond' è fuggita
ogni vergogna, ond' ogni bene è fuori
albergo di dolor, madre d'errori . . .'

('Babylon, whence all shame has fled
And all true virtue,
Hostelry of grief, home of all errors . . .')

she would have quoted them to the Pope—but she was not versed in poetry. She told him that the Court of Avignon, that ought to be a Paradise full of heavenly virtues, was instead a gutter of hellish vices, whose stench sickened the air around. Gregory was astonished to hear her utter such a severe judgment after only a few days' sojourn in the city, but she explained that while still in far-away Siena she had smelt the foul odour of the crimes committed at the Papal Court. In fact, in Siena she had often heard painful stories of the worldly lives of the Cardinals and prelates,

and had heard Avignon called an infernal Babylon by all classes of people. She could not know that what had happened in Avignon was what has happened and still happens in all cosmopolitan cities. All kinds of adventurers had flocked to the city, prostitutes had settled there, and fortune-hunters of all kinds, unscrupulous profiteers and violent and hot-tempered soldiery, anxious to be taken into the Papal pay. Clerics were there also, begging for offices and benefices, insinuating and importunate.

Money flowed abundantly, and encouraged every kind of luxury and vice. The agreeable climate and the attractions of court life drew crowds of idle rich and *dilettanti*, and men of the world. The Pope's patronage of the arts attracted painters and men of letters, and since the city was, after all, the central seat of Christendom, there were also there people of austere religious life, and scholars, and wise and pious folk. The population was a most varied mixture, and the city the most cosmopolitan of the age. The sacred and the profane, austerity and self-indulgence, grandeur and pettiness, elegance and filth, refinement and vulgarity, were all there together. The work of God and the work of the Devil were intermingled.

While Catherine passed her severe judgments on the city, its inhabitants probably considered her an insignificant provincial woman, or, at the best, a merciless ascetic. Many other ascetics had visited Avignon—in 1374 Milec of Kromerize had been there, preaching about the coming of anti-Christ, and the urgency of Church reform—but their apocalyptic voices had soon died away without leaving an echo in the pleasant life of Avignon. What could the 'beghina' of Siena hope to do? But Catherine was a great Christian and rightly demanded that the Papacy should uphold strict morality and purity of life. The Pope was, it is true, a ruler of a temporal kingdom, but above all else he was the ruler of the Church in which the morality taught by Christ should be supreme. There could be no compromise. The Church must return to its primitive purity. If Avignon was a stumbling-block, the Pope should abandon the city—yet another reason why he should return to Rome.

Only a few people took any notice of Catherine in Avignon. These were, first of all, her own fellow citizens, employed by the Curia, then the Tuscans and Italians, who venerated Saints, and

with whom she could speak in her own tongue. When she conversed with the Provençals or with the French she had to have an interpreter, and this made her talks less intimate and less frequent. Her disciples, however, spread the fame of her extraordinary life and of the diplomatic mission entrusted to her by the Florentines; Gregory XI also no doubt extolled her intellectual and spiritual qualities.

Soon after her arrival three very eminent prelates went to see her—possibly sent by the Pope. At first, by way of introduction, they expressed their surprise at finding a woman employed as Ambadress by the Florentines in such a delicate and important matter as the cause of peace; then they came to what mattered most to them—an examination of her faith. The interrogation was long and detailed: the results favourable to Catherine. Probably she told them she was acting under direct orders from God Himself, and perhaps she spoke as a prophetess, imparting to these dignitaries some of her own flaming ardour, so that when Giovanni Terzo at one point intervened to support Catherine, they said they preferred to listen to her. Stefano Maconi, reporting this interrogation, leaves us to infer that she spoke with confidence and humility, with precision and with charity, quoting facts and events, explaining everything clearly and without reserve. The few questions that Maconi records are insignificant; obviously others were put to her, more searching and more profound; but Catherine in her simplicity, founded on the Catholic faith, and with her own clear and charitable activity to speak for her, passed the ordeal successfully. The doctrinal test must have been the subject of talk by members of the Curia, for the next day Maestro Francesco, a Sienese physician in attendance on the Pope, observed to Maconi that if those three priests, the most learned of the whole Curia, 'had not found Catherine well grounded (in her faith) this journey to Avignon would have been the worst journey she had ever made'.

The external events of her life during these weeks in Avignon, all recorded by her early biographers, are of secondary importance. On one occasion she revealed the sinful life of the mistress of one of the most eminent prelates. This woman came to see her with a great show of piety and compunction, but Catherine could not bear to touch her and kept her face averted. Fra Raimondo, who

was probably acting as interpreter, was surprised at this and asked her for the reason. The Saint declared that from this lady, who looked so respectable, there emanated such a pestiferous stench of sin that it was unbearable. Fra Raimondo, on making certain enquiries, received information that confirmed Catherine's judgment.

In the Pope's own family there was great curiosity about the Sienese mystic. Gregory's sister became her devout admirer, but his niece Élise, the wife of Robert de Turenne, acted otherwise. One day she came with a group of curious onlookers to see Catherine in an ecstasy, and, refusing to believe her insensibility to physical sensations, she pierced her foot with a large pin—the same test that many people had applied to Catherine in Siena—inflicting such a wound that Catherine was lame for several days after.

Her disappointment at finding herself so rudely set aside by the Florentine Ambassadors was painful—but not overwhelming. The work she still had to do for the saving of souls required strength, energy and determination. In the letters she wrote to the Pope from Avignon we no longer find the half-wistful, half-exultant appeal for pardon and peace for the Florentines, but there is still the hammer-like insistence on the necessity of his return to Florence, and of the proclamation of the Crusade. She continued to pray for peace with Florence, but this was no longer the main object of her activity. She must have heard of the appeals presented to the Pope in favour of the Florentines by Benedetto Gambacorta, the Pisan Ambassador, and by the Ambassadors of Lucca, of the Pope's rejection of these appeals, and of his reply: 'Like Christ, I, His Vicar on earth, love peace; but it is my duty to offer it to the contrite of heart, not to those who refuse to make just restitution. Let the Florentines restore the lands of the Holy See and compensate for the grave losses they have inflicted; then the Church will at once receive them in her motherly embrace. For me to act otherwise would be like giving an encouragement to sin.'

Catherine approved of this dignified and severe reply, because it agreed with her own wish that Florence should receive pardon only after begging for it humbly from the Father of all Christians. She did not seek any further contact with the Florentine Ambassadors.

sadors who were now, according to Cristoforo da Piacenza, 'panting after peace'—she abandoned them to their own efforts, probably convinced that their official parleys with the two Cardinals, chosen by the Pope to treat with them, would bear no results.

Meanwhile she spoke with Cardinals, bishops, prelates of all ranks, enlarging her political horizon. Until now she had been occupied solely with the relations between the Tuscan cities and the Holy See; now she turned her attention to the Hundred Years' War, and other questions concerning France. She spoke with French princes, wrote to some also, and admonished them, and sent a letter to Charles V, King of France. Her religious status was officially strengthened; on July 1st Gregory granted her the privilege of possessing a portable altar, with permission to have Mass celebrated in any suitable place, if necessary even before dawn; on August 17th he confirmed Raimondo da Capua as Catherine's spiritual director, a post already assigned to him by the General of the Dominican Order.

The relations between Gregory and Catherine became, spiritually, more intimate. He believed in her revelations, and when in difficult moments he needed a sign from God to indicate his way, he sent messages to the Saint, begging her to implore illumination from God.

Somebody told him that he would be killed if he returned to Rome. This threat perplexed him temporarily, and at once, through Fra Raimondo da Capua, he begged the Tertiary to pray for him and to find out the will of God in this matter. Catherine prayed 'before and after Holy Communion', but saw in the future 'neither death nor any other peril', so she wrote to him that the real danger for him lay in listening to these evil counsellors; therefore he must not draw back, but put his plan into action. 'Let there be in you such a fire of charity that you may not hear the voices of incarnate devils; nor listen to the advice of perverse counsellors, grounded in self-love, who, as I understand it, want to frighten you, telling you that you will be killed; they say this to frighten you off your project.' But he must banish all servile fear: 'I tell you, on behalf of Jesus Christ, most sweet and holy Father, that you must not fear for any reason whatever; come confidently, put all your trust in sweet Jesus Christ; for, when you

do what you must, God will be for you, and no one shall stand against you. . . . Take up the weapon of the most Holy Cross, which is the safeguard and the life of Christians; let those speak who will, and hold fast to your holy purpose.'

There has been much discussion about the character of Gregory XI, and the influence Catherine had over him. This is not the place to continue this discussion, but nevertheless it seems necessary to stress the fact that Gregory was not at all a weak man, as he has been sometimes represented. Certainly he had neither the energy of Gregory VII nor the powerfulness of Innocent III, nor had he the ambitious will of Boniface VIII, but he was a just and tenacious man. Some historians have failed to understand him, mistaking his sense of justice and his long-suffering patience for weakness, and his constancy and firmness for obduracy. He was very frank, he disliked sudden decisions, he reflected at great length about questions concerning the State and tried to avoid violent clashes, but when it behoved him to act he acted wisely and struck boldly and authoritatively at the Church's enemies. He was a perfect example of a Christian law-giver and politician, judging all things not by a personal standard of his own, but according to the law of Christ and the welfare of men. He loved peace more than glory, and justice more than power. He was not a genius, nor had he an original message to deliver; as Pope he had some defects, but his righteousness was an example to all, and his dignity praiseworthy. He played his part in the making of peace between France and England, between the Empire and Hungary, and between Bavaria and Savoy; he forced the Visconti to observe truces and make a peace, he subdued the power of Florence, succeeded in winning back the Church lands, and crowned all with his own return, and the return of the Curia, to Rome.

It is true that every time Gregory XI fixed a date for his departure from Avignon a series of events prevented him from carrying out his plan; but to postpone is not to desist, and his purpose always remained firm. In fact, he saw more and more clearly the urgent political and religious necessity for the return of the Holy See to Rome. Already in February 1375 Cardinal Orsini, when replying to the Duke of Anjou, who in the name of France and for the sake of the Church was urging Gregory to stay in Avignon, had frankly expounded the political motives that

obliged the Papal Court to transfer itself to the Eternal City: 'What lands has the Pope in France? In Italy, instead, he has many provinces, and all the property of God's Church; his own land is therefore Italy, and if Italy is divided and torn by rebellion and strife, the fault is that of the former Popes who forsook her for so long. When was it known that a prince could rule his subjects well from a distance? Let the King of France try going away from his own lands and possessions, and he will soon see defections and strife in his State. Hence the urgent need of our return to Rome. Only by so doing will the Pope re-establish his authority in his own lands.' Just about the same time Gregory XI had explained his own intentions intimately to Giovanni di Cario, who had tried with many arguments to persuade him to stay: 'How could I stay if God wills me to go? Last year I did not obey God's will, and I fell ill and was near to death; it is my duty to go to Rome, for the natural seat of the Church is there.' This profound conviction enabled him to hold to his resolution, strengthened as it was, moreover, by political reasons of primary importance, that Gregory could not afford to ignore. His return was sure to win back the rebellious States, the Florentines would be forced to come to terms, and then he would be able to devote himself to the realisation of his dearest project, the Crusade, and the reform of ecclesiastical morals. Therefore, in 1376, he gave orders that preparations should be made in Rome for his return, and at Avignon for his imminent departure.

It was, however, a grave matter to leave for ever a city where the Papacy had resided for nearly three-quarters of a century, during which time vast, vital and deeply rooted interests had grown up between the Curia and Avignon. These could not be wiped out at a blow. The Pope felt bound to his own land; the Cardinals were, for the most part, Limousins or French; there were close ties with the King of France; many of the prelates were French or had French connections. Avignon had become a wealthy and luxurious city under the Papal rule; life was gay, and no one lived in fear of revolts or civil strife. What would become of Avignon without the Popes? Rome, deprived of the Head of the Church, had fallen into decay, spiritually and materially, had lived on her past glory, and in the hope of the Pope's return, as a means of regaining some of her lost dignity; nevertheless, she had

splendid traditions behind her, and it was natural she should wish to become rich and great again, under the Papal rule. But once the Papal Court had left Avignon, what hope could the city have of ever becoming anything but a small provincial town, whose sole boast would be that of having given hospitality to the Papacy for seventy years? The King of France would no longer be able to influence the Holy See as he had done during its long sojourn in Avignon. Finally, the Pope's parents, brothers and sisters, and all his other relatives who owed their authority and wealth to him, were naturally averse to the idea of his departure. Opposition arose from almost everyone, high and low, at this threat to Avignon, and every expedient was resorted to, to induce him to desist from his purpose. Some tried to dissuade him with eloquent and imploring words, others tried threats. Some foretold a sinister future in Rome, others went so far as to prophesy apocalyptic disasters. They all tried to intimidate him, invented plots against him, or plans to poison him, and foretold catastrophes for the Church. It was pointed out to him that Italy was in revolt, and therefore it would be impossible for the Curia to function there. Urban V also had gone to Rome, but, sadly disillusioned, had been forced to return to Avignon which was, after all, the ideal land for the Vicar of Christ. Those who did not dare to speak or write openly, insinuated whispered fears, or distressing news, or wrote to him anonymously. Gregory's determination remained firm, but the growth of the opposition naturally perturbed him. The step he was about to take was very grave; he felt it to be his bounden duty. But could he be sure it was really God's will? His own feelings might be deceiving him. The advice and arguments, the fiery speeches, even the threats of those who sought to dissuade him, were prompted by material interests—but they might also be a means which God was using to avert a disaster for the Church. He was seized by religious scruples that worried and agitated him. He lost his self-confidence, entrusted his life to God, and implored Him to reveal His will. He needed the sure vision of a Saint, and begged Catherine, the seer, to enlighten him. ✓

His own Cardinals were now opposing him. They wrote to him that before making any decision involving the Church he must seek the advice of the Sacred College, and they quoted Clement IV, who always took counsel with his Cardinals before ✓

acting, and followed their advice even when their wishes were contrary to his own. This was an attempt, already made several times before in the history of the Church, to limit the authority of the Pope and increase that of the College of Cardinals. Gregory understood the gravity of this request, and informed Catherine of it, begging her to pray over it and seek light from God. Catherine judged the Cardinals' letter very severely, and urged the Pope to take rapid and energetic action. 'Alas! most holy Father, they quote Pope Clement IV to you, but they do not quote Pope Urban V, who, when he was in doubt about a decision then consulted his Cardinals, but when the matter was clear and manifest to him, as it is to you about your departure, of which you are quite convinced, he did not ask for their advice, but followed his own plan and did not care even if they were all against him.' She reminded him that he had already once followed his Cardinals' advice, which was diabolical, and the revolts in his own lands were the consequence; he must not linger now, but hasten to depart. The Cardinals were prejudiced by their attachment to 'honours, positions, pleasures', and wished to deceive him; he must now turn the tables on them by means of a holy ruse; he must pretend to be prolonging his stay in Avignon, and instead he must leave at once. 'Go, go without fear.'

In this letter we see the prompting hand of someone who had known Urban V intimately, and this was perhaps Raimondo da Capua. Gregory must have felt relieved when he received her advice, sharp and decisive as a sword. A herald of God now assured him, in God's name, that his decision was necessary and just.

However, those who sought to deter him did not give up the struggle lightly. Aware of his strong religious feeling, they knew that the words of a Saint would have more power over him than anything else; they hoped in this way to neutralise his will, or at least to make him defer his departure. A 'Saint' who, as far as we know, preferred to remain anonymous, wrote warning him that if he went to Rome he would find there the poison that would end his life. Gregory himself must have doubted the sincerity of this letter, for he sent it at once to Catherine.

A few days previously she had found words of scorn for the Cardinals—now she seemed to have a tongue of fire to burn and

demolish the pseudo-Saint. Who is it, she says, who is writing to you now? He robes himself in sanctity, but he is a poisonous man, a devil. He acts towards you as the devil does with the soul, when 'under the guise of virtue and pity he pours in poison. . . . So methinks this devil incarnate is doing, for he has written to you under a guise of pity and with the fame of sanctity, that is, he writes as if the warning came from a holy, just man—and instead it comes from those wicked men, the devil's counsellors, who are out to destroy the well-being of Christian folk, and the reform of Holy Church, lovers of themselves, seekers after their own good.' Do you want a proof that this fellow is not a Saint? Consider the chief argument he uses to deter you from your proposal: he urges you to have a care for your life, which he says you would lose if you went to Rome. Now, a real Saint attaches no importance to material life; and since he affirms that to return to your own natural seat is a good, holy, and spiritual action, how can he, immediately after, advise you not to attempt such a thing, for fear of bodily harm? For the good of souls and for love of Holy Church we must be ready even to die, and 'it is not the habit of God's servants, for any corporal or temporal injury, even if life itself were at stake, to be willing to abandon spiritual activity; for if they had done so, no one would ever have arrived at his end, for it is the perseverance of good and holy desire in good works that is crowned with glory, as it deserves, and not with confusion'. I assure you, she goes on, that in the ways of holiness, this fellow is less than a child; let him go to school and study his trade. He is, moreover, a simpleton; in fact, he tells you to send trusty men to Rome, who, if they search in the shops there, will find the poison intended for you. What a wonderful discovery! Have the apothecaries in Avignon no poison? In all the cities of the world there are apothecaries that sell poisons, and naturally they are to be found in Rome too. But I tell you that this writer is 'the sower of the worst poison that has been sowed in Holy Church for many a long year, for he wants to prevent you from doing what God requires of you, and what you must do'. The real poison for you and for the Church would be to follow the advice of such an evil counsellor. But you may not, you must not withdraw from your intention, because such a withdrawal 'would cause a scandal, and a temporal and spiritual revolt, if men found in you falsehood

where they looked for truth; for once you have announced and determined your course of action, if people were to find the contrary, there would be the gravest scandal, disquiet and error in all hearts'. He advises you to live 'rather among the infidels and Saracens than among the people of Rome or Italy'. And what does he know of Italy? Catherine, the Italian, is inspired by love of her native land to express herself with an image which is full of the poetry of the maternal instinct: 'Methinks he wants to do with you, as the mother to her suckling child whom she wishes to wean. She puts something bitter on her breast, wishing him to suck the bitterness before the milk, so that for fear of the bitter taste he may give up sucking, because the child can be dissuaded by a bitter taste more easily than by anything else.'

The milk, in Catherine's metaphor, is the grace of God which will surely follow the Pope's return to Rome, and the bitterness comes from the more or less adverse events that may occur before he arrives in the Eternal City. 'And I pray you, on behalf of Christ crucified, not to be a timid child, but manly. Open your mouth and swallow the bitterness for the sake of the sweetness that comes after.' Drastic action, and such as God wills. 'I insist also that the writer of that letter is no Saint; it was dictated by the servants of the devil who live in the Curia near to you; but you will leave Avignon, and so you will find peace, repose and quiet of mind and body, and you will be able to set on foot the Crusade and reform the Church. May I see you? Could you grant me an audience? I am about to depart, but first I would like to see you again.'

This letter must have been very welcome to Gregory XI, because in it she expressed the will of God about his departure from Avignon. If she showed also some lack of understanding of his own scruples, he paid no attention to that. Catherine entered into ecstasies, spoke with Christ, saw the unfolding of human destiny through the eyes of God: that was enough for him. And now this seer and prophetess asserted, with absolute confidence, that his will was in conformity with Christ's; he felt his affection for Catherine and his confidence in her revelations increase.

During her stay in Avignon Catherine met many people, both Religious and lay, of outstanding importance; one of these was the Duke Louis of Anjou, who had been asked by his brother, the

King of France, to dissuade the Pope from returning to Rome. This prince played a part of some significance in the history of France and of Italy, using his intelligence in the service of his country, and his shrewdness to further his own ambitious schemes. He was a valiant soldier and an eloquent speaker. He loved his own land and eagerly co-operated with his brother in his efforts to consolidate his kingdom. He desired a kingdom for himself, even if it had to be a small one, but nevertheless he did not neglect French interests. As Lieutenant General of the Languedoc, he administered the province wisely. His wife was the daughter of a Saint, and he himself was on very friendly terms with Pope Gregory. Although cold and calculating by nature, he was not alien to enthusiasms. His religion was somewhat formal, but he was not insensible to promptings that seemed to be the voice of God. Rarely frank himself, and not always loyal, yet he recognised and appreciated frankness and loyalty. Thirsty for power, he intrigued to obtain it, and when he had obtained it he died without achieving glory.

Catherine certainly influenced him considerably, partly because she was so different from himself. Her way of speaking, so spontaneous and so inflamed with heavenly zeal, attracted him; at least for some weeks Louis of Anjou was her devoted admirer. We do not know whether she succeeded in kindling in him a flame of love, or at least of holy ambition, for the Crusade, but she may well have done so. He was above all a warrior, and when Catherine urged him, with all the persuasive and impulsive words at her command, to place himself at the head of an undertaking so glorious as the Crusade, she may have flattered his ambition for power and glory. Even the most frigid and calculating statesmen may be at times won over to attempt daring plans. They fail to see the difficulties always inherent in grandiose undertakings, and, conscious of their own energy and will-power, feel confident of success. Louis of Anjou, the schemer, may have sincerely believed, for a time, in the possibility of a Crusade led by himself. Certainly the idea of the holy expedition was not now very popular in the Courts of Europe, and the various princes were indifferent about it; yet Louis was, at least for a time, moved to express faith in it. After all, was it not possible for Gregory XI to rouse the Christian world, and for Catherine to fill rulers and populations with

enthusiasm for the campaign against the infidels: It might become an undertaking of gigantic proportions, supported by general enthusiasm, and he would be the 'condottiero', the conqueror; then at last he would have a kingdom and perhaps a greater one than Majorca, to which he was laying claim. Thus the Crusade stimulated his ambition and his ambition encouraged his belief in the Crusade. While this confidence lasted, which was but for a short time, he asked Catherine to write a letter to Charles the Wise, King of France, to invite him to make a speedy peace with England, so as to free himself from further anxiety on that score, and be able to support with all his might the Crusade, of which Louis would be the leader. And he also begged Catherine to go with him to Paris to convince the King of the necessity of the holy expedition.

While the Duke of Anjou became an admirer of Catherine, she believed she had found in him the man she had long been looking for, the military leader of the imminent Crusade, and in her joy she wrote at once, characteristically, to Charles V: 'Methinks that your brother, the Lord Duke of Anjou, will undertake, for Christ's sake, the labour of the holy enterprise', and also, with joy, pride and confidence, to Gregory XI: 'I know that I believe you said, when I was in the presence of Your Holiness, that a princely leader was necessary; otherwise you did not see how the thing could be done. Here is the leader, Holy Father! The Duke of Anjou is willing, for love of Christ and in reverence for the Holy Cross, with loving and holy desire to take up this labour, which seems light to him because of the love he feels for the holy expedition; it will seem most sweet to him, provided that you, my most holy Father, will be pleased to appoint him. Alas! for sweet Jesus' sake, do not delay any longer before you put into effect your holy desire and sweet will! Know, know how to use the gifts and treasures of Christ, that he sends to you now, while you have still time.'

It was then August 25th and in the Papal city the preparations for departure were so advanced that a few days later, according to Cristoforo da Piacenza, no matters of state were any longer discussed in the Curia because everyone was too busy getting ready for the journey to Rome. The Pope's mind was obviously made up, and this was at last recognised by the King of France

and his representatives, who gave up their opposition. Madame Denis-Boulet shrewdly observes that by this time Charles V, having been victorious in his war with England and unified most of France under his rule, had no longer any absolute need of the Pope in Avignon, and so made merely formal protests. 'I wonder whether the King of France, and the ecclesiastical dignitaries who opposed the departure, really thought they could prevent it with their theatrical show of opposition. Gregory would have dishonoured himself for ever if at the last moment he had yielded to such arguments. Possibly, they merely wished to prove to the population of that region that had battered upon the Papal Court, that up to the last moment they had done all in their power to prevent the Pope from leaving.' Nevertheless there is no doubt that, even if Catherine was not responsible for changing the intentions of the French King's representatives, she helped to persuade the Duke of Anjou to desist from his mission; he became, indeed, so favourable to Gregory's decision that he even lent him 60,000 florins for the journey to Rome. Of course he may have done this so as to bind the Pope more closely to himself, and to ensure his support in the achievement of his own ambitions. But it may also be that the Angevin prince was really moved by Catherine's words, and so in all sincerity supported and aided the Pope's return to Rome, for the good of the universal Church.

Catherine accepted the Duke's invitation to go to his castle of Roquemaure 'to console his wife, the Duchess', says Bartolomeo Dominici. This 'consolation' probably refers to the Duchess Marie's longing to have a son, and a son was born to her in October of the following year. Catherine remained in the castle for three days, and must have edified her hosts by her religious life, clear as daylight, her ecstasies, her almost ethereal way of living and her continual prayers. Louis of Anjou himself admired her greatly. In the frequent and familiar talks he had with her he could not but feel how close was her union with the divine. He was fascinated by her, and would willingly have escorted her to Paris, to see his brother Charles V, to try to interest him in the Crusade—but Catherine declined this invitation. Although the holy expedition was so dear to her heart, and the King of France's part in it might prove decisive, yet she would not go so far from Avignon, lest the intrigues and snares of the Court might become

dangerous, and the insistent appeals to remain might influence Pope Gregory. She felt she must stay near the Pope, ready to oppose any further postponement of his journey to Rome. The departure was now very near; twenty-six galleys and four hundred and twenty-six ships were at Marseilles awaiting the Pope and his Court.

Gregory had decided that he would leave Avignon for ever on September 8th; the date was postponed again. Catherine must have trembled—but the delay was brief. On the 10th or 11th September the Pope wished to canonise John III, Duke of Brittany; on September 12th there was to be a public Consistory during which he would bless the whole Court and solemnly declare the transference of the Curia from Avignon to Rome. By now even the most optimistic prelates had lost all hope of the Pope remaining in Avignon. The various and cunning arguments by which they had sought to dissuade him had been vain, and the obstacles placed in his path had proved useless. The French King's brothers had ceased their opposition, the Cardinals were busy packing; but the city was agitated, irritated, disconsolate and still determined to hold on to the Pope. His own relations besieged him with anguished prayers to remain. Where reasons of state had failed to move him perhaps the tears and despair of parents, brothers, sisters, nephews might avail. Gregory XI seems to have been almost on the point of yielding. His grief at leaving his own land, and the distress of his dearest kin, must have sapped his moral strength; yet he could not now withdraw. 'Whoever does not leave father, mother, brothers and sisters for love of Me is not worthy of Me': the words of Christ seemed engraved on his soul; he resisted all prayers and subdued his own emotions. But he felt terribly alone; he needed a final word of certainty. For the last time he sent for the Sienese Saint, to listen again to her inspired words. He wished once more to strengthen his resolve by hearing that his return to Rome was according to the will of God. He called her to him. We know very little about this last interview but, according to Bartolomeo Dominici, when the Pope asked her if it was right to persist in going to Rome in the face of so much opposition, Catherine at first hesitated to reply, excusing herself by saying that it was not seemly for a poor little woman to give advice to the Pope. To which he answered: 'I am not

asking you for advice, but for a revelation of the will of God'. Then Catherine reminded Gregory XI of a vow that he had made at the time of his election to the Papal throne. No one knew of this, except a very few people in whom he had confided. At once the Pope thought that if Catherine knew of it, it must be by direct revelation. It was therefore his absolute duty to depart, and nothing must be allowed to stand in the way of his decision.

On September 13th, to Catherine's great joy, Gregory XI left Avignon for Marseilles, where the galleys awaited him, ready to set sail for Italy.

Chapter IX

INTER ODIA CARITAS

SHORTLY after the Pope's departure Catherine herself and her Family set out from Avignon to return to Italy. On September 12th Fra Raimondo da Capua had received the Pope's gift to Catherine: a hundred florins for the expenses of their return journey. It may be wondered why Gregory XI did not invite Catherine to return by sea with him. Several explanations are possible; none is sure. Perhaps he did invite her, and she declined the invitation; or perhaps he did not wish her to travel in his own party, lest she should be too gravely shocked by the immorality of the Court; or again, because being Italian, of humble birth and a great enthusiast for the return of the Holy See to Rome, she may have been unpopular with the higher clergy; or—and this seems the most plausible supposition—because Gregory XI considered her work for him now accomplished, and wished her to use her energy in the saving of souls and in propaganda for the Crusade, his own daring project, in the countries through which she would pass. Catherine may have remained in Avignon in continual prayer for him until she heard he had gone on board his ship on the River Rhone, and even after this she may have wished to linger a little in the city to please Neri di Landoccio, who enjoyed his stay in Avignon and was reluctant to leave the city: 'I beg you for the love of Christ Crucified not to do as you did in Avignon, where you were unwilling to make any preparations for our departure', his friend Stefano Maconi wrote to him months later.

Catherine and her disciples travelled through Toulon to Varazze, which they reached on October 3rd, and then went on to Genoa. We hear of her performing miracles in all these cities, but those who report them seem unreliable witnesses. In Genoa

the Saint and her Family were the guests of the noble lady Orietta Scotti, between whom and Catherine there arose a friendship that we find still flourishing at the end of 1378, or at the beginning of 1379, in the sad days of the schism, when Catherine wrote to Orietta a letter that was like a hymn to patience.

We cannot trace all Catherine's activity in Genoa, but we know that she met the monks of San Girolamo della Cervaia, on the mountain above Portofino, for later on she wrote to them all, or to their Prior, very edifying letters. She cured her own disciples, Neri di Landoccio Pagliaresi, Stefano Maconi, Fra Giovanni Terzo and Fra Bartolomeo Dominici as soon as they fell ill, more or less seriously, of the plague. Pagliaresi was on the point of death, to the great consternation of all his fellow disciples, who, led by Stefano Maconi, appealed to Catherine to intervene when the doctors gave up hope of his recovery. She seemed somewhat unwilling, but yielded to Stefano's entreaties, and prayed insistently to God for the youth's recovery. He recovered. Shortly afterwards Stefano himself showed symptoms of the plague, but was cured by a few words from Catherine.

At Genoa Catherine had news of her mother Lapa, who was distressed at her daughter's protracted absence. She heard also, perhaps, of the foolish talk there had been in Siena, among Dominican Sisters of the Third Order, and certain clerics too, about her prolonged wanderings. So she wrote to her mother lovingly, but with characteristic firmness, authority and confidence: 'You know I have to follow the will of God; and I know you want me to do this. It was His will that I should make this journey, which has not been without its own mysterious and useful rewards. It is His will that I have obeyed, and not the will of any man, and whoever says the contrary is false.'

There is no proof, historically speaking, that she met Gregory XI in Genoa. He had disembarked there on October 18th, with some members of his Court, and remained there for some days, not only to rest after his voyage, but to dedicate himself at once, and without delay, to the affairs of Italy. He received the Duke of Brunswick, husband of Queen Giovanna of Naples, and the Count of Virtú; he spoke to the Doge and the rulers of the Genoese Republic. The voyage had exhausted him because for sixteen days, between Marseilles and Genoa, the weather had been

wild and stormy. Winds and tempests had unleashed their fury, as if the very elements were protesting at the Pope's departure from Avignon. Many times the ships had had to put in for shelter at the nearest port; the Cardinals and prelates were full of dismay. Nevertheless, Gregory's determination to push on to Rome had never faltered. He needed the help of this noble Genoese Republic, which welcomed the returning Pontiff with such effusions of joy. He wanted the Genoese to co-operate with him in the plans he was about to put into execution; and, with this desire uppermost, he began at once his talks with the rulers of the State. He made considerable demands. According to Mirot, he requested that the King of Cyprus' brother, held a prisoner by the Genoese, should be set free; he wished the Republic to enter into a League with him; he asked for a loan of two hundred thousand florins, and two hundred crossbowmen; he demanded the expulsion of all Florentines from Genoese territory. These demands were all necessary for the prestige of the Papacy and the success of his Italian policy; but they conflicted with the political and commercial interests of Genoa, and were therefore refused. This was Gregory's first political setback, and came as soon as he landed in Italy. Although he was saddened by it, his hopes of restoring strength and greatness to the Papacy in Italy were undiminished. Many of the Cardinals wished to return to Provence, and it seems that in a Consistory held in Genoa they voted for this, but Gregory would not listen to them, and persevered in his intention to continue the journey to Rome.

In Genoa, in fact, he was not at all the wavering and broken-hearted Pope that some writers have loved to present. The testimony of Fra Securiano da Savona, the only source for this period, is far from reliable. It is coloured with a cheap romanticism and evidently written with the intention of capturing the popular imagination. Gregory is described as a timid man, crushed by adversity, who visits Catherine secretly by night, imploring her to give him strength to perform his Papal duties. Various later biographers, basing their accounts on this source, have concentrated their searchlights only on Catherine, who alone at this juncture, according to them, commands, decides and triumphs. But their too obvious apologetic intention is not really complimentary to her at all: she has enough strength and courage in

herself without needing to be contrasted with a weakling Pope. Moreover, Gregory's character was very different from that attributed to him by these writers, who show a lack of literary honesty in making him appear other than he really was. It is certainly true that he believed in divine revelations, as he showed in his dealings first with St Brigid of Sweden and later with St Catherine; but once he was convinced that a certain line of conduct was in accordance with the will of God, nothing could prevent him from persisting in his intention. On various occasions he showed that he felt himself to be a King, as well as a Pope, and knew how to rule his Court. We must presume, therefore, that the account of the secret nocturnal interview, described by Securiano da Savona and amplified and emphasised by later biographers, originated in a misinterpretation of the prayer composed by Catherine in Genoa—a prayer that the Pope might not yield to the persuasions of some of his Cardinals, and return to Avignon. This prayer was at once known to some of the Saint's admirers, and was perhaps sent on to the Pope himself. It was a fine eloquent prayer, but couched in general terms, inspired by the news that was then rife in Genoa about the dreadful voyage the Papal Court had endured, and the unwillingness of some of the Cardinals to continue the journey. The note preceding the prayer determines its place and circumstances; otherwise we might think it had been composed elsewhere and at another time. There is nothing in it to indicate Gregory's state of mind beyond a reference to his 'tardiness', which might displease the Eternal Charity; but ever since Catherine had taken to writing to the Pope she had thought and said quite plainly that he was tardy. It is true that in this prayer she warned Christ's Vicar 'not to be frightened by any adversity', but this has no particular reference and need not necessarily be connected with the journey to Rome, nor even with the opposition of the Cardinals and prelates at that moment. It might refer to all the struggles which Gregory, as a man and as a Pope, had to face, and would have to face in the future.

Although, from the historical point of view, no valid arguments or witnesses can assure us that this interview took place, nevertheless we may follow a faint tradition and believe that the Pope did meet Catherine, in the midst of the intense political labours of those days. He may have granted an interview to her

and her interpreter, Fra Raimondo, and if so he probably treated them both affectionately, remembering that Catherine's eloquence in speech and writing might be of the greatest service to him in the furthering of his Italian policy. All this remains in the realm of pure conjecture, however, for the Saint's biographers and travelling companions tell us nothing about it.

Gregory left Genoa on October 26th, and about ten days later Catherine left for Pisa, where she arrived towards the end of November. From Pisa she sent Stefano Maconi to Siena, to his mother, who was anxious about her son's protracted absence, while she received the visits of her own mother, Lapa, and of Fra Tommaso della Fonte, and other disciples who had come from Siena.

In Pisa she must have heard a lot of talk about the very recent ceremonial welcome that Gambacorta, accompanied by his sons and numerous Ambassadors and prelates of Pisa and Lucca, had offered the Pope when he disembarked at Leghorn. It had been a sumptuous festival, with abundant gifts of wines, calves, sheep, poultry, bread, preserves and wax offered to the Pope, the Cardinals and the ships' captains.

The Pisan Republic had wished to signify its attachment to the Holy See in no uncertain manner. Catherine must have rejoiced on hearing that the Pisans and Lucchesi, although still members of the anti-Papal League, openly showed their affection for the Papacy, and so indicated a certain detachment from their ally Florence. Gambacorta, in conversation with the Pope, pursued his idea of peace between the Tuscan cities and the Holy See, and hinted at the advantages that would accrue from a possible reconciliation between the Pope and Florence, but Gregory XI 'did not wish to hear even a word about that'—which must have distressed Gambacorta. Speaking of this later on to Catherine he tried to persuade her to second his efforts for a speedy peace. But Catherine, during her short stay in Pisa, was chiefly occupied in preaching the Crusade against the infidels, the reform of ecclesiastical morals, and the need for all men to steep themselves in the Blood of Christ—although she never neglected any occasion to find out the attitude of the population towards the supreme Pontiff.

At Pisa she received wistful appeals from her 'little son', Stefano Maconi, who felt lost and melancholy without his 'most

sweet Mother', and impatient requests to return at once to Siena because he missed her so much, and because her other disciples also were anxiously awaiting their Mother. This anxiety, thought Catherine, was not worthy of true Christians. Stefano was evidently still attached to the world of the senses, while he who lives in Christ is not bound by any human affection. How could she abandon her labours for the salvation of souls, and interrupt her efforts to promote the welfare of the whole Church, just to run to him because he felt lonely? He who feels lonely has not Christ in himself, but is only on the threshold of spiritual life. Therefore the Saint wrote to her disconsolate disciple a letter full of affectionate warning, pointing out to him that he did not yet show the true spirit of Christ: 'You are only at the beginning', she told him, that is, preparing the ground whereon, later, Christ may build: a hard labour, in fact, the hardest, if truth be told; 'think that the laying of the foundations is the worst toil of all; once the foundations are laid the building is soon completed'. When the foundations were firm he would become another man, 'able to do all things', no longer attached to the world of the senses; and all melancholy longing for people and things would disappear. Now he was 'weak and fragile as regards the senses', but afterwards he would become strong, and in place of his own will he would put the will of Christ. He must then steep himself in the fire of divine charity that he would find in the Blood, and in the Blood he must drown and kill all will of his own. In this way the inner conflict that agitated and grieved him would be composed and, in the newly-found wealth of his interior life, he would desire nothing outside himself. Then he would be 'strong and persevering', overcoming the weakness of his own sensuality, 'and bitterness will taste sweet to you and warfare bring you peace'.

We do not know exactly when Catherine returned to Siena—perhaps towards the end of December, or at the beginning of January 1377. Her own city does not seem to have taken much notice of her, although naturally her Family welcomed her with great rejoicing, and in religious circles she must have been held in even more reverence than before, because of the rumours that she was responsible for the Pope's return to Italy. She took up once more her apostolic work. Spiritual conversation, prayers, preach-

ing, colloquies, helping and advising all who came to her, and reconciling mutually hostile families—these were her daily tasks. Amidst this continual round of duties she did not fail to keep herself informed, especially through Fra Raimondo, of all that concerned the Pope's journey, and the reception he received in the lands of the Holy See. Nor did she wish to lose all personal contact with Gregory XI, and whenever the chance occurred she sent him a letter by the hand of a friend or a devout person who had business with the Curia.

The Pope had arrived at Corneto on December 6th, and had been welcomed by a rejoicing crowd 'three miles long', who had gone to meet him, waving olive branches and singing the *Te Deum*. It was a triumphal arrival: the keys of Rome were presented to him, he was hailed as the bearer of peace, and was entreated for mercy—yet he was not able to continue his journey to the Eternal City as he had hoped. It was necessary first that agreement should be reached between the 'Banderesi',† or Governors of Rome, and the Cardinals of Ostia and Santa Sabina, the Pope's envoys. These negotiations were difficult and took several weeks to arrange, so that Gregory had to stay at Corneto till January 13th, 1377. Catherine's letter reached him there, brought to him by Tommaso di Guelfuccio. It was a characteristic epistle: as Christ's Vicar Gregory must be stalwart in travail and adversity. He must bring peace to Christians 'in whatever way your conscience will allow you'. He must wage war on the infidels. But the passage in Catherine's letter that must have touched the Pope most was that concerning Siena. It was true, she said, that the city had joined the Anti-Papal League, but not of its own will; there were hundreds and thousands of Siennese who disapproved of the pact, although they had been forced to accept it. And since they grieved over it now, Catherine entreated the Pope to pardon the poor city: 'where they look to you as to a Father, hope in you, believe in you. Be loving with this wretched little city, which has always been a child of Your Holiness, and has been constrained by necessity to do things that displeased it. The people think they were obliged to do so. You yourself must excuse them to Your Holiness, so that you may catch them with the bait of love.'

† The Banderesi (Bannerets) were the military leaders of the various 'rioni' or wards of Rome, and the real rulers of the Republic. The Pope was merely their titular Prince.

In these days a weighty matter occupied Catherine's thought. She had gathered around her numerous men and women disciples whom she dominated completely, but who were not linked together by any close bond. At her death they would probably be dispersed; perhaps there would be no one to continue her work. Why should she not found a convent for women, an exemplary convent after her own heart? Already some months previously she had written to the Abbot of St Antimo: 'I should like, in so far as it is possible for you to help me in this, to find a suitable place where I could found a real and good convent, and place therein two good Superiors, for we can already lay our hands on many members for it'. It is natural for an apostle to desire to have disciples who can, in a certain sense, give continuity to his thought and action, to wish to draw together into a harmonious community people of differing character, temperament and feeling, to fuse their wills into one common aim, that is, the salvation of souls and the spiritualising of the world. To enable darkened and deafened souls to become clear and expressive, and to raise them from earthly to heavenly ways is, one might say, an essential aim of a servant of God. After all, this is the purpose of the various monastic and conventual rules, to continue, in every place and every age, the slow spiritual transformation of men, to spread the Christian faith, and make the power of prayer and love an ever present force.

It is true that the written Rule may become with the passing of time a formal instrument tending to maintain a merely external character. To avoid this danger some of the Saints tried to engrave in their disciples' hearts a spiritual Rule that could be handed down with unimpaired vigour, but unwritten Rules become enfeebled in the course of generations, and in the end are lost to memory. The written monastic Rules have a cohesive power which, even when slackened with age, lasts longer and is more powerful.

We do not know that Catherine thought of transmitting her own ardent faith through a Rule conceived by herself—or whether she had in mind the foundation of a convent *sui generis*, which should increase and spread in the whole world, so as to become later on a real and active religious Order. She may have hoped for this, but it was not a dominating purpose, for when she

decided to found a convent, it was to be of the Dominican type, a convent of strict observance, but without new or particular features. Her own character did not fit her to be a foundress of convents, like St Teresa of Avila. Although she herself submitted to the Rule of the Third Order of St Dominic, she felt within her, more intimate and more powerful, the Rule given her by Christ Himself. She was a great Religious, and a humble one, but at the same time she wished to be free and independent within the ambit of the Catholic faith—and when she believed a course of action to be right and good and willed by God, there was no Rule that could prevent her from carrying it out. This is magnificent Christianity, but not meant for the majority of souls, who always need the help of external laws, and are glad to have tasks assigned to them from without. Catherine was an out-and-out individualist; perhaps that is why she did not succeed in founding a convent of a permanent character.

On her return to Siena with greatly increased fame, very many people went to her to beg for her counsel and spiritual help, and she obtained some remarkable conversions. Among these was that of Nanni di Ser Vanni de' Savini. The 'Leggenda Minore' tells us he was a man 'chock-full of worldly prudence, tightly held in the devil's snares, and full of hatred for almost everyone'. The Republic had made use of him for delicate missions, as when he was sent in 1366 to Sir John Hawkwood to dissuade him from his intention of invading and devastating Sienese territory; in 1368 he was one of the Twelve rulers; in 1371 he was so actively opposed to the Commune that he was fined five hundred florins; after this he lived in close association with the Salimbeni, hated and opposed by many in Siena. He was hard-natured, restless, turbulent and vindictive. His shrewdness and capacity for intrigue often enabled him to outwit his enemies and aroused their fear. Although he was so quarrelsome, violent, selfish and irreligious, he always kept in touch with Religious, and it was, in fact, on William of Fleete's advice that he went to see Catherine. It is true that this visit took place at a time when he was gravely threatened by the Commune of Siena, and when his very life was in danger. He may have had a presentiment that he would not survive the adversities that were about to overwhelm him. Or perhaps his troubled soul felt the need of a word of peace and light: he was tired of the continual

struggle, and sought a little inner tranquillity. He may even have been curious to discover what he could of the secret power of this Saint of whom so much was told. The fact is that he came to Catherine, listened to her words, and then opened his heart to her and became converted. Before he was arrested by order of the Podestà, either out of spontaneous gratitude, or in reply to a request from Catherine, he gave her a fortress of his at Belcaro, in a half-ruined condition because three years previously, when in the possession of the Salimbeni, it had been dismantled and in great part destroyed in an uprising against that family. Here the new convent was to arise. Catherine busied herself at once over this project. First of all she begged for Papal permission. While in Avignon she had perhaps revealed to Gregory her intention to found a convent of strict observance, and he may have given her his encouragement; now it was no longer simply an intention—the land was there, ready to be built on; the money for building could easily be found; the future nuns were there already. Gregory sent her a Bull authorising her to build or institute her convent, and named as his Commissioner for the purpose Giovanni di Gano, the Abbot of Sant' Antimo, Catherine's friend and confidant. He also granted the convent a dowry of up to two thousand florins. No sooner had Catherine received the Pope's consent than she set about obtaining permission for the Commune of Siena. The Republic would not allow fortified places to change hands without official permission. Therefore Catherine presented an instance to the 'Magnificent Defenders of the People and City of Siena', begging to be authorised to receive as a gift the ruined fortress of Belcaro, and to build therein a convent for nuns. These authorisations were discussed and granted on January 25th, 1377.

This new form of activity required of Catherine energy, prayerfulness, shrewdness and decision. From what we know of her we can be sure she concentrated all her powers to achieve her new purpose: to find the money required for building, to supervise the labour, prepare the arrangements for conventual life, choose the Superiors to leave in charge during her own absence, and the new nuns, postulants, and lay Sisters. Did she desire her convent to initiate profound reforms among Dominican Sisters, reforms which might be extended later on to the Friaries of the Dominicans, and to other Orders also? Did she dream of remaining there,

at Belcaro, amongst her fellow Sisters, imparting to them her own ardent and lively faith, and preparing them to carry on her work after her death? Or was her time at Belcaro a sort of retreat, necessary to prepare herself for her approaching end? She may have desired to commune more closely with God, and the new convent may have seemed to her an excellent place for a spiritual retreat. Some psychological evidence may be adduced for all these suppositions, but none of them is supported by any factual proof. All we can affirm is that she had a convent built (or at least partially built) and that nuns were gathered there, and it was consecrated and received the name of Santa Maria degli Angeli. We know that she tried to draw to it more nuns, such as the Contessa Benedetta, daughter of Giovanni d'Agnolino Salimbeni, and that when she was far away she always recommended the convent to her 'children'. 'I recommend to you the Convent of Santa Maria degli Angeli. And do not take any notice of my own absence! Nay, good children try to do even more when their mother is not there, wishing to show the love they have for her, and to win her approval.' On April 16th, 1377, she wrote from Belcaro to Gregory XI urging him to make peace and to forgive his rebellious children, and at the same time she told him that the convent he had granted to her had been inaugurated. In giving this news she is full of joy and lively gratitude. But Catherine was by nature not merely a contemplative; nor was she a nun in the strict sense of the word. She was continually communing with the divine, but she needed to work among men, to speak with them, warn and help them. The work she could do in a cloister was of too limited a nature. Her new community, composed of disciples who revered their Mother and hung on her every word, failed to satisfy her longing for wider activity, now that she was accustomed to live in the midst of the most varied folk, speaking with the Pope, with Cardinals and Princes, with lay disciples too, and conversing about civil and political as well as religious problems. Belcaro would be for her a place of rest, not a permanent home. She was not intended to 'stay put' in a convent; her 'temperament' was not suitable for an abbess; she needed ceaseless activity, and her field of action was with crowds invoking her aid, and with rulers of the State or of the Church, teaching them to live their Christian faith. She loved meditation, continual prayer,

and solitude, but her life had to contain these and something more. With her, action and contemplation had to alternate harmoniously. Her ecstasies were more blissful if she could diffuse love among men, and work for the visible progress of the Church. Not for her the strict timetable of the cloister, nor a restricted circle in which her thoughts and actions must revolve. She sacrificed herself for others, but without set times and places. She needed to know at first hand the sufferings of the world, and to offer herself every day in sacrifice, as she moved among people who sinned and suffered. 'The cell of self-knowledge' was the refuge of her soul; but the cell was not bounded by walls, she bore it with her at every moment of the day and to the most varied places. Although she had her own intimate and secret rule, yet she had to be absolute mistress of her own time. And as she was a real apostle she did not think that others should come to her, but that she should go to them. This profound need of social life prevented her from staying long in the convent of Belcaro, and letting it circumscribe her thought and activity. On April 25th, 1377, she was in Siena, according to Raimondo da Capua, and four days later she was visiting the monks of a Cistercian monastery, probably that of Maggiano; then she was travelling about the Siennese province, and lingering in the Valle dell' Orcia. We hear of her at Montepulciano, Castiglioncello Trinoro, Rocca a Tennenano, the Abbey of Sant' Antimo, and Monte Giovi. A large group of disciples accompanied her; besides fellow Tertiaries there were Fra Tommaso della Fonte, Fra Bartolomeo Dominici, Fra Raimondo da Capua, Fra Matteo Tolomei, and among the laymen Neri di Landoccio, Malavolti, Gabriele Piccolomini, and Pietro di Giovanni Ventura. Her apostolate was on a grand scale; she pacified the Tolomei and the Salimbeni, preached peace and love to all, exorcised the possessed, cured the suffering, and restored faith to those who had lost it. She converted two poets, Giacomo de' Cavalieri and Anastagio di Ser Guido da Montalcino, who from that time onwards extolled her in mellifluous verse filled with silvery haloes, pearly shadows and roseate visions. She passed through the Valle dell' Orcia like an envoy from God, stirring all who listened to her profound words, learnt in rapt contemplation of her Creator.

Nevertheless, this mission of hers, though great and holy, was

like other missions of other and lesser Saints; in her life it may even be considered as a sort of interval, before her resumption of more characteristic activity. The letters she wrote in these months to the Tolomei, the Trincei, the Farnese, and the Belforti are noble and inspiring, full of spiritual strength, but add nothing to her greatness in our eyes. She herself was aware that her work of pacification and redemption was of a local and limited character, and so, although she poured into it all her ardour of soul, she kept her gaze fixed on the greater work she was anxious to promote: the pacification of Italy, the proclamation of the Crusade, and to crown all, the reform of the clergy. She longed to be near the Pope: 'I have a great desire to be in the presence of Your Holiness. I have many things to speak about; I have not come to you, because of the many tasks, good and useful for the Church, that I have had to perform. Peace, peace, for the love of Christ Crucified, and no more war—for there is no other way.' Tommaseo interprets this as a gentle refusal of an invitation from the Pope to go to him in Rome—thus attributing to her a certain self-confidence or arrogance with regard to Gregory XI, of which she showed no trace. Instead, her words should rather be understood as an offer and a request at the same time: she had expressed herself in a similar way in Avignon. It was a delicate way of asking for an interview with the Pope. When she says she has not been to Rome because of the many tasks undertaken for the good of the Church, she does not mean: 'I have too much to do here, to think about going there', but rather: 'I am working for the good of the Church, and of my own will I do not wish to interrupt this work; but, nevertheless, if Your Holiness commands it, I will at once leave everything to come to you.'

In the Valle dell' Orcia she did not neglect the affairs of Italy, but prepared plans and treaties for the triumph of the Church. 'Catherine sent me . . . to Rome to Gregory XI with some excellent treaties . . . if they had been understood—for God's Holy Church', said Fra Raimondo da Capua. We do not know what these treaties were, or for whom they were intended, or what was their scope. We presume that Catherine and her friends were thinking along political lines as well as simply preaching the salvation of souls. And this was natural. Whoever preaches 'Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God' preaches an absolute

rule of life, and therefore a certain way of dealing with other men, that is, a social system: hence a political system, too. It is not possible to separate secular from religious life when religion rules the soul. Only when religious feeling declines do men begin to feel aware of a social conscience as distinct from the religious conscience, and independent of this. It is true that Christ said: 'Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's', but when we believe that the whole world must be ruled in a Christian way, that the Church is the perfect human organisation and that the Pope is supreme Head of all Christians—then it is not possible to separate the religious world from the ethical, political and social spheres. 'A 'totalitarian Catholic' like Catherine could not conceive of the State being outside the Church, nor admit that there could be Christian governments independent of Christ's Vicar, or, worse still, in revolt against him. She was therefore quite sincere when she wrote to the Lords Defenders and the Captain of the People of the city of Siena. 'I came for nought else but to feed on souls and snatch them away from the clutches of the devil.' Here, as in the letter, written about the same time, addressed to Salvi di Messer Piero, she rejected the accusation of political activity, because for her there was no such thing as politics apart from religion—for she identified the one with the other. Christ was the universal King, and she acted in His name. The world at peace, the triumph of virtue and love—these were what Christ desired, and she, His bride, had the duty to preach them to all and in every place, even at the risk of displeasing some rulers. She had in view not the material greatness of single states, but the spiritual greatness of all Christendom: 'So my fellow citizens think that through me or through my companions, treaties are made; they tell the truth for, without knowledge, they speak prophetically; for I will do nothing else, and I want my companions to do nothing else, but defeat the devil and rob him of the mastery that he has assumed over man because of mortal sin, and I want to take hatred out of man's heart, and reconcile him with Christ Crucified, and with his neighbour. These are the treaties that we are busied with, and anyone who is with me also.' Comparing this passage with what Fra Raimondo tells us about the treaties suggested by Catherine and taken by him to the Pope, we deduce that she considered political treaties as a part, or conse-

quence, of the Christian way of life, and in fact she could not conceive of politics divorced from religion.

On the other hand, it was natural also for the Signori of Siena, which officially belonged to the Anti-Papal League, to get alarmed at the reports of Catherine's apostleship. Was she not preaching that all Christians must be subject to the Pope? And did not her sermons in praise of peace and love imply condemnation of the Siennese government that had sided with Florence, and therefore condemnation of the war against the Pope? Moreover, she was accompanied by men of political interests such as Raimondo da Capua and the Abbot of Sant' Antimo, whose only purpose was to bring about a Papal victory over the League. Siena, like Florence, distinguished sharply between religion and politics, and therefore feared and opposed all that might in any way support the Papacy, which, according to them, was dominated by French prelates, and therefore hostile to Tuscany and the rest of Italy. Such a different way of looking at religion and the State meant there could be no mutual understanding between Catherine and the defenders of Siena; hence the Siennese suspicion and distrust of her, and their remonstrances, couched in temperate and prudent terms.

Warnings and remonstrances were of no avail; she went on undaunted, with her plans for a Christian peace, in pursuit of which she despatched Fra Raimondo to Rome with the above-mentioned treaties, and with the intention, perhaps, of arranging interviews for her with the Pope. She wished to speak with Gregory XI. Nearly a year had passed since her last audiences with him, and in the meantime there had been grave and painful events. Francesco di Vico had defeated the Papal troops. The war was claiming numerous victims, and, as at Cesena, many innocent lives. In Tuscany the people were becoming discontented, and suffering the consequences of the Interdict; in Florence those who longed for peace, in opposition to the inexorable War Party, were growing more numerous every day. The cities and townships of central Italy lived in constant dread of the approach of the mercenary Companies of Fortune; in Bologna, in March, there had been cries in the streets of 'Death to the Florentine traitors!'; on the other hand the Church lacked unity, brotherliness and serenity, and was still ruled by selfishness, ambition, and the greed

for wealth. Catherine had long meditated on these evils and had received in God a clear vision of the remedies to apply; she wanted to tell the Pope of these, and she wanted him to listen to her and follow her advice, as he had done in Avignon.

This time, however, she met with ill success. Fra Raimondo was received with cold hostility by the Curia, and the plans, conceived by Catherine, which were to have given peace and prosperity to the peoples, neither moved the Pope nor aroused his interest. Fra Raimondo was very disappointed, and in his distress told the Saint about his disillusionment, confusion and dismay on hearing the Papal Court express ideas so completely contrary to those he and his 'Mother' thought excellent. But Catherine was not distressed at this news, nor did she lose one jot or tittle of her faith; she saw all this hostility on the part of the Curia as the work of the devil, who wanted to undo the good that they, by inspiration from God, tried to do. They must not be cast down; on the contrary, they must fight and overcome all opposition. Fra Raimondo must take heart, strengthen his own belief, and trust in Him who can do all: 'I have heard . . . that you have had great difficulties, and that your mind has been clouded with sadness through the illusions and deceits of the devil, who wishes you to take right for wrong, and wrong for right; and he does this to prevent you from pressing on to your goal. But take comfort, for God has provided, and will provide, and His providence will not fail you. See that in all necessities you have recourse to Mary, and embrace the Holy Cross; and never let your mind be confused, but see that you sail over the stormy sea in the little boat of divine mercy. I know that from both Religious and lay folk, even within the mystical body of Holy Church, you have received or suffered from persecution, or the displeasure and indignation of the Vicar of Christ, either for yourself, or for me. Do not oppose all these creatures, but bear all with patience, departing thence at once and retiring into your cell to examine yourself with a holy conscience, thinking that God makes you worthy to endure, for love of the truth, and to be persecuted for His name's sake, with real humility deeming yourself worthy of the punishment and unworthy of the fruit. And all the things you have to do, see that you perform them with prudence, with God always before your eyes; and what you have to say or do, say it and do it before God and before

yourself, and with the help of most holy prayer. Then you will find the teacher of holy clemency, the Holy Spirit, who will pour into you such a light of wisdom that you will be able to discern and choose what will be to His honour. This is the doctrine that is given us by the sweet primal Truth, providing for our needs with measureless love.'

All at once, however, the letter changes tone; Catherine is no longer writing to Fra Raimondo but to the Pope himself. She has a moment of fear or anguish; has she perhaps been rebuked by Gregory, or threatened, or entreated in one way or another not to busy herself any more in Church affairs? We do not know, but her heartfelt appeal to the Pope leads us to believe this was the case: 'And to whom shall I run if you forsake me? Who would come to my help? To whom could I flee if you drove me away? My persecutors persecute me and I flee for shelter to you and to other sons and servants of God.' She goes on to say that if he refuses to receive her she will flee to Christ, who will welcome her in spite of all her sins; and if Christ welcomes her, the Pope too, His Vicar, will have to receive her, and so they will go forward manfully together, striving for the good of the Church. 'In the Church is my watch-post and my station as sentinel and warrior; in the Church I wish to end my days, with tears, sweat and sighs, and give my blood, and the very marrow of my bones.' Only in the Church could she feel free and unhindered, whatever might befall her; 'and if all the world drove me out, I would not care about it, resting with tears and patience on the bosom of the sweet Bride'. Her faith in Christ never falters, she is sure her place is in the Church, she trusts the Pope; nevertheless a little bitterness remains in her soul: 'I felt disappointment for the injury done to the Church and for your disappointment', she wrote later on to Fra Raimondo, who, soon after his arrival in Rome, had been appointed by his Superior Prior of the Minerva Church, and so could not return to his Mother, as he wished. Catherine felt this disappointment, but was not saddened by it; it was necessary to pass through this to find sweetness and solace. In fact, the bitterness must be fully savoured to be useful: 'rejoice in suffering, for the Truth has promised us refreshment after sorrow'.

Catherine had recourse to ever more constant prayer and self-study. One ardent desire she had never been able to see gratified:

her desire to write. When the heart is full to overflowing, what better relief is there than to write to those who love and understand? Catherine had several secretaries at her disposal, ready at her call; they admired her whole-heartedly, but in certain moments her heart shunned all intermediaries. However intimate and sympathetic a secretary may be, one cannot reveal to him all the hidden thoughts of the soul. There is a spiritual shyness which bids us confide only to the written word the outpourings of the heart. An intermediary cools our inspiration, lessens our ardour, weakens our expression. There is always something that we are ashamed to reveal to a third person, even to a loved disciple, especially when our thoughts or affections are turned to another. Naturally, therefore, Catherine wished to learn to write, and for several years she watched the formation of letters and words, trying to acquire the necessary skill to be able, without the aid of secretaries, to pour out the flood of her enthusiasm and transmit directly the fervour of her faith. Naturally she was overjoyed when she found she could indite her first letters. She wrote to Fra Raimondo: 'This letter, and another that I sent you, I have written with my own hand at Isola della Rocca, with so many sighs and tears that my eyes could not see for looking—I was so full of wonder at myself and at God's goodness, considering His mercy towards His creatures that have the gift of reason, and His providence that is so abundant for me; for, in His mercy, as I was deprived of this consolation through my own ignorance, He has of His providence granted me the gift of being able to write; so that when I came down from the heights I might have some outlet for my bursting heart. Not wishing to withdraw me yet from this life of shadows, He has taught me this art in a wonderful way, as the teacher does to the child, showing him by example. Hence, as soon as He departed, with the glorious Evangelist John, and Thomas of Aquinas, I, still sleeping, began to learn.'

Her expression: 'so full of wonder at myself and at God's goodness' aptly describes her state of mind when she began to write. For her and for her companions it was miraculous, or the unexpected result of a long and constant preparation. We do not know whether she wrote her first sentences during a vision, but this may well be true, as she had a most powerful capacity for assimilation, and things she had closely observed had a way of

reappearing to her, sublimated or magnified, during her ecstasies and visions. She tells us herself that she had an aptitude for writing; and so the forms of letters, syllables and words that she had read over a period of several years had been impressed on her mind, and now seemed to spring to life as she wrote; as her pen expressed her thoughts her hand seemed to be guided by a will other than her own. As she wrote and read over again what she had written, she rejoiced amid her tears. At last, when her heart was full and needed an outlet, 'not to burst', she could, without the help of intermediaries, write to someone who would understand her, freely expressing what God had suggested or revealed to her.

In 1377, perhaps during the second half of May, Fra Raimondo went to Rome, sent there, as we have seen, by Catherine, with the 'treaties' which both Catherine and her faithful adviser hoped might serve as a foundation for a firm peace between the Holy See and Tuscany. But he was the bearer of other information also. Towards the end of April, or at the beginning of May, he had had in Siena a conversation with Niccolò Soderini about the question of war or peace for Florence. Soderini was proposing to overthrow the 'Eight of War' and set up a government favourable to peace in their place. All the Florentines, said Catherine, or at least all those worthy of the name, want peace; there are only four, or, at the most, six powerful rulers who ruthlessly impose their will on all others; why should they not be cast out of the government? They are evil-minded, enemies of the common good; it would be a meritorious act to depose them. But to do so it would be necessary for the Guelph party to combine with certain citizens of good will. To whom was Soderini referring when he spoke of '*aliqui ex bonis civibus*'? Perhaps some of the Signori themselves, who privately opposed the war, but openly voted for it in their Council meetings. Soderini seems to be asking for the support of the Dominican Order in favour of a more energetic and determined propaganda in Florence, in order to inspire with courage those citizens of good will of whom he speaks. What could give them greater courage than the conviction that they were working for the cause of God? Who could better arouse such a conviction than the Preaching Friars? It may even be that Soderini, in this suggestion, was aiming at getting Catherine herself to come to Florence, in support of his plan. In any case, he had recourse to

Fra Raimondo because he knew him to be a prudent and capable politician, who enjoyed the esteem of Gregory XI, and was well thought of by the Curia; he was sure he would find some way of strengthening the Party in Florence, and so furthering the peace that all desired.

We do not know what was Fra Raimondo's answer; but in all probability he promised to take up this matter as soon as he arrived in Rome, whither he was bound. Certainly he did not turn the proposal down: 'Having heard this', he writes, 'I kept it to myself, but when I came to the Vicar of Christ, to whom I was sent by Catherine, I reported to him all that I had heard from that man'.

Gregory XI was feeling the worse for the climate of Rome, and was displeased with the way things were going in Italy. He had given up the delightful life of Avignon to come to Rome, because he hoped to restore the temporal power of the Church; he had believed that, once he arrived in the Eternal City, all Catholics would not only rejoice but would rally round him to support him in the great ecclesiastical reforms he wished to carry out. But now he had already been in Rome for several months, and riots, insurrections and rebellions were breaking out just as before. In fact, in the City of the Martyrs itself the strife was becoming more and more dangerous. The writer of his 'Prima Vita' tells us that Gregory was terrified and dismayed, seeing himself deceived and cheated by those who had assured him that as soon as he set foot in Rome a sign from him would pacify all Italy. Instead, what did he behold? Ever more defections and rebellions, while even those who until a few months before had been tranquil and submissive now began to fall away from him. Moreover, the State was in a bad way financially; his own health was failing; the Florentines were out to arouse new enmities against him and to strengthen his old foes, and meanwhile they strove to defeat his militias and to bribe their Captains. The Republic was determined to oblige him to accept a dictated peace. Wherever he turned he saw nothing but obstacles and iniquity. He was naturally distressed and despondent. His state of mind is seen in the letter he wrote to the Florentines, in which he compared the advantages of the life in Avignon with the difficulties, anxieties, cares, hostilities and struggles he had to contend with in Italy, and in Rome itself. He

was irritable; even trifling worries made him indignant and harsh.

Fra Raimondo therefore came to him at an unfortunate moment. Gregory XI loved and revered Catherine as a Saint, not as a political thinker; the suggestions she sent to him—in other circumstances he would have smiled at them good-humouredly—angered him now that he saw the inconsistency of the prophecies about his return to Rome. Fra Raimondo enjoyed no better fortune with the Curia, for most of the members of the Papal Court were enraged at having left the calm and serenity of Avignon for the confusion, uncertainty and anarchy of Rome.

However, even if adversities had soured Gregory's temper, they had no power to overcome him. He had faith in the justice of his cause and believed in a future peace for all Christendom. Although his body was ailing and his heart well-nigh broken he gathered all his energies to restore the fullness of the temporal power. He was a man of faith and a wise politician, and through faith and wisdom he was able to achieve, at least in part, his immediate purpose. The *bonus et purus aër* of Anagni restored his health, so that during his summer sojourn there he was able to work assiduously for the good of the Church. Pastor says: 'Little by little events began to turn in his favour, thanks to his wise policy of generously rewarding the faithful, harshly punishing the impenitent, and graciously forgiving the repentant. He succeeded in reconciling the wealthy city of Bologna to the Church (in a Bull of August 21st) and in drawing over to his own side Rodolfo da Varano, the supreme leader of the Florentines.' It may be added that Lucca and Pisa had never wished to impair their own good relations with the Papacy, and Siena itself was always timid and wavering. The Florentines now realised that their city no longer showed the unity and solidarity of the preceding year, and they decided to send their Ambassadors to the Pope to ask for a reconciliation. It was not that the rulers desired peace, but they wanted to show their own good will to the populace, now restless and longing for peace, so as to be able to throw the blame for the failure of their peace effort on the Pope, who, they would say, proposed unacceptable conditions.

The anonymous Florentine Diarist wrote, as if with a sigh of longing: 'It is said they will arrive at an agreement for peace; please God it may be so!'—and he wrote this on June 13th,

when reporting the arrival of the Florentine Ambassadors at the Papal Court at Anagni. And Stefani Marchionne di Coppo asserts that in the year 1377 in Florence 'the war was becoming unpopular and money not easily forthcoming, while the leaders of the Guelph party were inciting the people against the Eight Rulers who wanted war and not peace—so that whoever sided with them (the Guelphs) went in great fear and danger'.

While staying at Anagni the Pope once more felt fatherly towards Catherine, and received Fra Raimondo in a more friendly manner. In October he gave him a letter for Catherine which Fra Raimondo sent to her in the Valle d'Orcia, together with one from himself. Catherine rejoiced at receiving both these letters, whose contents are unknown to us. Probably, the Pope gave his ill-health as a reason for not having written to her for so long. She says: 'So, having read the letters and understood all, I begged a serving-maid of God'—she means herself—'to offer up tears and sweat to God for the Bride and for the ailing Father'. Her joy at receiving the letter from her 'sweet Father' was so great that she was plunged into ecstasies and visions. She described these later on in a letter to Fra Raimondo, written in her own hand (No. 272 of Tommaseo's edition), which contains at least in part, as Dupré-Theseider has recently demonstrated, the animating idea of the 'Dialogue'.

Possibly Gregory XI had begun to consider making use of Catherine's eloquence to persuade the Florentines to rebel against the Eight of War and insist on their rulers making peace with the Holy See. Soderini's proposal to Fra Raimondo, which he had reported to the Pope, must have made him reflect on the good results that might be obtained in this way. Who better than Catherine could spread political propaganda under the form of religion? Who could more eloquently preach in Florence the necessity for making peace with the Holy See, without incurring the anger of the government and being persecuted? It was clear now that the war would never be brought to an end by force of arms alone, and Gregory XI was aware of this; nor could he hope to win by diplomatic means, for the Florentines were always watchful, astute, ready to counter-attack or even to take the initiative. At the end of October, moreover, the troops of his Captain, Rodolfo da Varano, had been beaten by the Condottieri

of the anti-Papal League and pursued up to the walls of Camerino, so that there was great jubilation in Florence where the banners snatched from their enemies were carried amidst great rejoicing through the streets. Another means must therefore be sought to beat down the power of Florence. During the summer months Gregory had had some political successes, and on his return to Rome the oath of allegiance that he received from the Ambassadors of Foligno and the peace he was able to sign with the Prefect of that city, Francesco da Vico, were proof of this; but he needed to find a way of overthrowing the Florentine government, the source of all the recent troubles of the Holy See. He was attracted by the idea of forming in Florence a considerable nucleus of people faithful to the Papacy and working for its cause. If he could succeed in this he could see the possibility of preparing a peace in the near future. In August he had sent to Florence two Friars: the Franciscan Lodovico of Venice and the Augustinian hermit Giovanni of Basle. In November Giovanni of Basle had gone back to Florence again; but Catherine could, much more easily than these, spread an active and profitable propaganda because of the high esteem in which she was held in the city. With this design probably already decided upon, Gregory, on his return to Rome, invited Fra Raimondo to dine with him and expounded to him his plan: 'They have written to me that if Catherine goes to Florence I shall have peace'. And to Fra Raimondo, who impulsively volunteered his own services for the new mission, he replied that he must decline his offer because the Florentines would ill-treat him, while Catherine, a woman revered by many in Florence, would not be exposed to grave danger; moreover, she would be able to speak with a freedom not granted to others. Perhaps the Pope forbore to say that neither Fra Raimondo nor any other Dominican follower of the Saint possessed her power to move hearts and arouse enthusiasm for the Church.

Thus, while Catherine was spending Advent at Rocca d'Orcia, her new mission in the Church's cause was being decided in Rome. This was rather a sad time for her. As her exterior activity became more limited she delved ever deeper into the depths of her soul, examining her own being and her own work and finding nothing of much value there. 'My life is of little use to others; rather is it painful and burdensome to all creatures, far and near, because of

my sins.' A desolate state of mind, like the desolate winter landscape of Rocca d'Orcia, where she felt 'the winds beat in from every side'. She looked at herself, then at Christ, and measured the dividing gulf. She contemplated humanity in travail and realised she could do very little to alleviate the misery of men. Yet she knew she must continue to share the sufferings of others, and atone for the sins of all with her own sufferings. With these thoughts in her mind her heart became aflame with desire, and a prayer burst from the depths of her soul, a prayer that sings itself like a hymn: 'So may my sufferings be my food, my tears my drink, my sweat my ointment! May my sufferings nourish me, heal me, give me light, give me wisdom, clothe me; may my sufferings strip me of all spiritual and temporal self-love. . . . May God in His pity grant me to live in anguish for the love of virtue, and in my suffering to offer Him my sad and anguished desires for the salvation of the whole world and for the reform of Holy Church.'

It is not too fanciful to suppose that Catherine's prayers were answered in Gregory XI's plan to send her to Florence. While the Saint was longing to be of use to her 'sweet Father' he was giving the order to send her to defend the Papal cause, not as an Ambassadress, for she would certainly have been outwitted by the cunning Florentines, but as a Religious, to stir up the already unquiet consciences of the Catholics of Florence, strengthening their desire to submit to the Interdict and put their trust in their Holy Father.

Catherine arrived in Florence some time in the early spring of 1378. She had men and women disciples with her, and began her work at once, with all her energy.

The city had a wretched appearance in those days. The grey atmosphere of the streets and hills accorded well with the sadness the citizens felt. Even the sunlight that lit the olive groves and brushed with gold the *pietra serena* of the palaces could not warm their mournful hearts. The self-confident, bold and aggressive spirit that Catherine had noticed in the Florentines two years before had almost disappeared. The city was in distress and overhung by a dreadful threat; the future was obscure. The economic and spiritual ruin of the Republic, which few had foreseen the year before, was now clear to all, and most of the citizens openly

deprecatd the war. Two years previously they had discussed peace proposals with Catherine and had asked her to speed the negotiations with the Pope, but, as we have seen, their proposals and offers were insincere, and intended only to further their own political aims; in those days they were sure of victory, even hopeful of an overwhelming triumph; now they were doubtful of winning the war, and nearly everyone wanted peace. Catherine's labour, therefore, was on a fertile soil. Her appeals and warnings found a widespread welcome and consent, and her hope of concluding a peace with the Pope was echoed in many hearts. Discontent with their rulers, and especially with the Eight of War, grew apace. The movement for peace acquired more power and authority every day. Verses invoking peace began to circulate in the city:

'Peace, by God, and naught but peace,
Peace alone, for war is evil for Florence,
Peace to restore this land,
Peace we ask for, for love of peace!'

The verses are uncouth but they express very clearly a sturdy popular demand for peace, and for this reason are quoted by the anonymous *Diarist* of Florence, as representing not the cry of a solitary, but the prayer of a whole people that longs to be freed from the sufferings of war. Gone were the days when political speeches urging the people to further efforts found a ready response. Now even the pealing of bells, the display of banners and lighting of bonfires that announced the news of every victory of the armies of the League, which once filled the city and its surrounding countryside with joy and excitement, produced only a passing mood of exultation and hope. The drying up of trade and industry, the increase of poverty, and the spectre of worse to come, the hourly struggle against the difficulties caused by the war, had the effect of plunging the people back once more into an even greater dejection. In their distress they turned to God, begging Him to touch the hearts of their rulers and incline them towards peace: 'Peace! we ask God for peace; the Lord grant us peace, that we may go in peace, and put peace in the hearts of those who disdain it!'

There was then a general desire for peace, which the Interdict had greatly helped to foster, for as soon as this ban was declared

the Florentines were seized with a sort of religious frenzy, as if they wished to prove that they were fervid Christians even without the Divine Office. In the churches hundreds of men and women sang the 'Laudi' with joy; every day endless processions passed through the city streets, bearing relics of the Saints, with hymns and music; vast sums of money were spent on candles and sacred books; thousands of people, of all ages and classes, scourged themselves in public; everyone was fasting, praying and performing works of piety. Conversions were numerous, asceticism became fashionable, a zeal for salvation seemed to arise spontaneously. 'And again many young nobles and rich men were moved, or became converted, and built themselves cells at Fiesole, and gave alms, and then fasted and prayed and slept on straw and on the naked ground. They converted sinful women and attired them and took them also to Fiesole and gave them alms, and restored convents; in this way many rich youths were not ashamed to despise themselves and forsake the world, and to go begging for the poorer converts.'

This form of religious enthusiasm had also a political background, for the Florentines wanted to prove that even in their excommunicated city they still practised their faith with fervour, and the Interdict had not prevented them from being good Catholics. As Stefani Marchionne di Coppo observed: 'It looked as if they wished to defeat and humiliate the Pope, while remaining obedient sons of the Church'.

With the passing of months the apostolic fervour of the citizens became dulled, and their *alleluias* became *misereres*. The processions were even more numerous than before, but no longer rejoicing. Now the faithful implored the intercessions of Mary and the Saints and clamoured for the Divine Office. Prayers and scourgings were no longer witnesses to a robust faith which persisted even without the aid of Masses; they had become sacrificial offerings for peace. The desire to 'defeat and humiliate the Pope' by showing their religious fervour, unabated despite the Interdict, was no longer there; in the year of grace 1377 they implored God to inspire the Pope to give them peace, 'praying Almighty God to open the heart of the Holy Father, Messer the Pope, that he may show mercy to us sinners, and that it may please Him to send to him and to us holy peace'.

The desire for pardon is already timidly showing its head. The Florentines hope the Pope will offer them peace—they do not want to have to beseech him for it. They are, however, for the first time showing that their consciences are uneasy about their behaviour with regard to him.

The lack of divine services is disturbing to them and leaves a painful gap in their lives. Growing distress irritates and depresses them. They try to propitiate God, with many mortifications; the 'Flagellants' become more and more numerous; the opposition to the war grows ever stronger. The Signoria realise that Florence is in grave danger. What better means could be found of restoring tranquillity than by giving them back their Mass and sacraments? The government therefore orders all the priests to officiate and the citizens to attend divine worship. This is a violation of the Interdict. Schism now looms on the horizon, and perhaps the Pope fears it. In any case, he condemns the Florentines and orders all the priests—with the exception of two, who are to remain to baptise the newly born—to leave the diocese; a great number of priests and friars choose to obey the Signoria rather than the Pope, and continue to say Mass, to communicate, to give blessings, and to preach the Florentine cause. The Pope can do no more than use threats or, better, avail himself of the intervention of the Saints to re-establish the significance of the Interdict. Catherine, whose eloquence softens the heart, persuades the intellect, and fills the soul with holy enthusiasm, is sure, he thinks, to make the Florentines respect the Interdict, and will be able to remind the priests of their strict duty as priests of Rome, arousing in them a greater spirit of sacrifice and a real attachment to the cause of the Church. With this purely religious aim in mind, as well as the political purpose already alluded to, Gregory XI had sent Catherine to Florence.

She found support from the Dominicans of Santa Maria Novella, from the Guelph Party, and especially from Soderini. The Party was endeavouring to seize power from the Eight of War, so as to make peace with the Pope—an aim of which Catherine could only approve. It is true that the Party did not always act for the general good of Florence—in fact, some of its leaders were out to achieve their own ends for motives of personal ambition or vendetta; but Catherine's own straight forward-

ness and simplicity prevented her from suspecting crookedness in others; to her it was inconceivable that in such a grave struggle as this between Florence and the Holy See, there should be anyone who pursued any other end but that of the common good, and the triumph of the Church. She believed what the Party leaders told her, attended their meetings, approved of their plans, and urged all who heard her to put an end to the war. She never perceived that she had become, in a certain sense, a Party tool. She took the Guelph leaders for friends and supporters, and never doubted their sincerity or loyalty. She had found new disciples who loved her and whom she loved. There was Giannozzo Sacchetti, brother of the poet Francesco Sacchetti, and himself no mean versifier. He was obsessed by the fear of death, and in some of his poems seemed almost to express a presentiment of his own tragic end. He found in Catherine's words and prayers consolation for his tormented soul.

He wrote: 'Grief weighs me down so heavily that I am cast down like a man worn out and beaten by Fortune'. But the energetic Catherine knew how to rouse and encourage him, and dissipate his sadness with love, which increased his faith and filled him with joy. He was a real poet, but dwelt too much on his own sorrows. Perhaps his disorderly life made him desperate at times, but he felt the need for renewal . . . 'I wish to return to my divine Creator—in a new ship, with a new rudder'. She taught him to seek after God, who would fulfil all his longing. There was a trace of morbidity in the pleasure he felt in the contemplation of his mistress's beautiful body, decomposed and corrupt in death. Funereal thoughts disturbed and weakened him; he needed the gleam of faith and the flame of love. Catherine wanted him to be a poet, a healthy, vigorous poet—and she gave him some of her own ardour and inspiration: 'Drown yourself in the source of love, if you seek for love'. By her side Giannozzo lived a new life. Full of love like a mother, full of understanding like the dearest of friends, terrible sometimes in warning or advice, she guided and ennobled him. He needed her look, her word. Left to himself he did not always see clearly, he fell easily into intrigues, became weak, uncertain; with her help he acquired clarity, strength, will-power, courage. She loved him as if he were her child, and did all she could to pluck the bitterness from his heart, and spiritualise his art and his life.

Barduccio Canigiani, too, became in these days her disciple and was soon her beloved son. He was very young when he first knew her, of frail constitution and with a tendency towards consumption, but his heart was generous and he could love with rare constancy. Raimondo da Capua, who knew him well, describes him as being 'adorned with all the virtues'; and Giovanni of the Cells, whose disciple he was before he met Catherine, writing to him on the occasion of the Saint's death, treats him as if he were an angel on earth: 'Come to your brethren', he says, 'who await you with great longing; for they believe they will be receiving an angel when they receive you'. He was the son of Pietro Canigiani and the brother of Ristoro, both prominent Guelphs who met Catherine during her visit to Florence. They supported her in her political mission, proclaimed her sanctity and her great virtues throughout the city, and remained in correspondence with her after her departure.

As far as we can tell from the scanty facts we know about him, Barduccio shared more in Catherine's religious life than in her political activity. He followed her to Siena and to Rome, was always very close to her, and helped her by acting as her secretary, always drinking in her words and moulding his own soul according to her teaching. Only in the atmosphere she created around her could he breathe at his ease; by her side he shared her overflowing love and found a new motive for living. Therefore, when his Mother died, he lost some of his inner poise and gave way to profound distress; he felt 'like a puny child, left orphaned through the death of so great a mother'. The intense sensibility of his soul induced a languor which fostered incipient consumption; very soon the disease got a firm hold of him and he began to decline; in little more than two years after Catherine's death Barduccio, too, entered his grave. It was a happy death, however; his biographers tell us that when he was dying he began suddenly to smile, and it seemed to the onlookers as if he saw his Mother drawing him to herself.

Catherine found much support from the friars of Santa Maria Novella, and especially from the wise and learned young Dominican Alessio Strozzi. He pleaded her cause and urged all his relations—they were numerous and influential—to follow her advice and defend her from the attacks of her enemies; even in the most

difficult and dangerous crises he never abandoned her for a moment, and did his best to placate the wrath of her adversaries.

Catherine, therefore, among so many old and new friends, felt protected and aided while she delivered her eloquent message. She cared nothing for the accusations of her enemies or the insults of the rulers, who described her as a 'hypocritical and wicked woman'. Her mission was sacred: to make peace between Florence and the Pope she was ready to do all, bear all, dare all, even death.

Gregory XI had hoped for good results from Catherine's efforts in favour of peace, but his shrewdness as a politician made him aware that propaganda alone, even that of a holy and venerable woman, would not bring about peace with Florence in a short time. And he wanted peace as soon as possible. In November 1377 he had proposed to the Florentine Government, through Fra Giovanni of Basle, a meeting of representatives of both sides at Viterbo or Piombino or Pisa, in order to negotiate. When, however, many weeks had gone by without any result, he sent Ambassadors to Bernabò Visconti 'to negotiate peace, for us and for them', says the anonymous Florentine Diarist. This new move might seem surprising: why should the Pope, who had shown himself so hard and resolute with Florence, now become so merciful as to take the initiative in offering peace? It was not for the sake of any material gain, nor was it through weakness; it was, we believe, because his religious conscience prevailed over his political sense. His health was rapidly failing, and this also was an inducement to think more of spiritual than of merely political issues. He had dreamt of restoring the Papal State to its former power, and for this he had come to Rome, renouncing the pleasant seat of Avignon. He desired also to eliminate discords among Christians, and promote peace between the peoples; he wanted to root out the heresies that were fed and fostered by these quarrels between the Holy See and other governments; he hoped to reform the clergy and to proclaim a great crusade for the conversion and conquest of the Mahomedan world; but, after several years of rule and innumerable efforts, he saw that he was still far from his longed-for goal. His strength was declining. Why should he not at least eliminate the war with Florence, that had been and still was the cause of so many troubles, with a magnanimous

gesture: By so doing his own prestige might suffer, but what of that? It would be for the good of the Church. Peace would bring her considerable benefits that in all probability he would not live to see, but that did not matter to him. The greatness of the Church came first, his own political prestige could easily be sacrificed.

Possibly he remembered some phrases from letters that Catherine had written to him: 'It is better to give up the gold of temporal matters, rather than lose the gold of spiritual matters. Do then all you can, and when you have done all you are justified before God and before the men of this world. You will beat them more easily with the rod of kindness, love and peace than with the rod of war, and your spiritual and temporal losses will be restored to you. . . . It seems that God shows no other way; I see no other way in Him, except the way of peace. Peace, peace then for love of Christ Crucified! Do not consider the rudeness, blindness and pride of your children. With peace you will draw the sword and the rancour out of their hearts and all their quarrelsomeness, and you will bind them together.' In another letter we read: 'in whatever way your conscience will allow you to make peace'—a phrase that may have dwelt unobserved in the depths of Gregory's soul, to reappear more vividly during moments of reflection on his pontificate, on the greatness of Christ and the wretchedness of men. It may be that, knowing he was near to death, he desired to imitate Christ more closely than before, and become more loving and more merciful to all. 'I want you to be a tree of love grafted on the Word of love, Christ Crucified', Catherine had told him; was not this indeed his true task as Vicar of Christ? 'Let your kindness conquer their malice and pride', she wrote again. He knew she was right: he resolved to be kind.

Bernabò Visconti consented to be a mediator for peace, and during the first ten days of March 1378 he gathered together at Sarzana the Cardinal of Amiens, the Archbishop of Narbona and the Bishop of Pamplona, who represented the Pope, Pazzino degli Strozzi, Alessandro dell' Antella, Simone di Rinieri Salviati, and Benedetto di Nerozzo degli Alberti, Ambassadors for Florence. There were also observers sent by her allies, and representatives of Naples, Venice and France. It was a real Congress, presided over with tact by Visconti. Agreement was reached

fairly rapidly: Florence and her allies were to pay the Holy See eight hundred thousand florins. Regarding the restitution by Florence of the Papal lands and ecclesiastical property sequestered, the annulment of measures passed against the Inquisition, the raising of the Interdict and other matters there was much discussion and a conflict of opinions, but all the States alike needed peace and were trying hard to reach a fair conclusion when the news came that on March 27th Gregory XI had died. Immediately the negotiations were suspended and the Congress dissolved; the Ambassadors departed: 'The Cardinals departed, leaving everything in confusion, and the Ambassadors went away, and Bernabo also went away to Naples'. The plans for peace had suffered shipwreck once more.

The news of the Pope's death was received with joy in Florence: 'Great bonfires were lit in Florence and the country around'; the hope at once arose that a new Pope, friendly to the Republic, would be elected. As soon as it was known, on the 12th of April, that Bartolomeo Prignano had been proclaimed Pope, all felt more tranquil and satisfied: '... and he is a Neapolitan and said to be friendly to us, and those Limousin† Cardinals have been passed over. Amen!' wrote the Florentine Diarist. But what thoughts, what emotions were Catherine's when she heard of the death of her 'most sweet Father'? We may be sure that, whatever her hopes or fears, she remained calm, placing all her confidence in God. She rejoiced when she received reassuring, perhaps even joyful, news from Raimondo da Capua.

During his stay in Rome Fra Raimondo had become a political figure of a certain importance. He was familiar with some of the Cardinals, enjoyed the confidence of various leaders in Rome, was invited to take part in the City Councils and was consulted by the 'Banderesi', the Governors of Rome, on the best way of obtaining from the Conclave a Pope to their own taste. He was convinced that the Church needed an Italian Pope, a strong and religious man; strength was all-important. So, as soon as the name of Bartolomeo Prignano was murmured as '*Papabile*' in the Curia, even before the Conclave commenced, he was very pleased: 'I like him because he is a good man and an Italian, but I think him

† The Limousin province (the territory around Limoges) still formed part of the possessions of the English King in France.

somewhat soft and remissive', was his first judgment, which showed how little he knew the future Pope, and proves also how greatly he desired a Pope of strong will. Soon after his election praises of the new Pontiff were ringing through Rome: 'The Church of God will be well governed'; 'It is more than a hundred years since the Church has had such a shepherd'. Anecdotes were repeated representing him as energetic, solicitous for the good of the Church and jealous of his personal prerogatives. It was said, for example, that he found letters of Gregory XI directing that the sum of four hundred francs from the Papal treasury should be spent as a ransom for Gregory's brother, held prisoner by the English. Urban VI withheld this sum because he said the money belonged to the Church and could be spent only for the needs of the Church. He was said to be prudent, shrewd, expert in worldly business, and mindful of religious principles. Fra Raimondo could desire no one better. He soon became his enthusiastic admirer, and imparted his enthusiasm to Catherine. 'You sent me this news telling me to rejoice and be glad; and I have had great joy of it', she replied to him.

In Florence also a flattering picture was drawn of the new Pope: had he not already called to order the Limousin and French Cardinals, who had wanted him to dance to their piping? 'Since God has granted me the grace of being made Pope', he told them, 'I intend to be Pope', and he said also: 'I intend to stay in Rome, and to make Cardinals here in Italy, and I intend to make peace, and not for money'. This was an implicit condemnation of the policy of Gregory XI and aroused joy in the Florentines, exhausted by the war. These phrases, whether the Pope ever uttered them or not, excited the popular imagination and enlisted sympathy for the erstwhile Archbishop of Bari, now Vicar of Christ. If Catherine heard them she must have rejoiced; and perhaps it was then that she thought of sending Neri di Landoccio to the Papal Court so as to have another trusted friend there, besides Raimondo, who might approach the Pope on her behalf. She was keenly interested in all he did, and observed his actions with fervent affection: 'according to what they have written to me from Rome it seems that he (the Pope) has begun his work in a manly manner, and is out to win souls'. She judged him to be a religious Pope, felt him to be of one mind with herself, and hoped that he would co-

operate with her to bring about peace with Florence. 'And since I know his holy will, I am hopeful, if my sins do not stand in the way, that soon we shall have peace', the peace she yearned for. The behaviour of the Florentine priests had grieved her very much; the Religious and the secular priests and, more than all, the Franciscans, not only had ignored the Interdict but were trying to convince those of God's priests who were good and obedient to the Holy See, to celebrate the Divine Office, while they urged the faithful to attend divine services. They were pusillanimous friars and priests, said Catherine, servile of soul, given over to the pleasures of the senses, vain and timid; and they were responsible for the schism that was fast approaching: 'Alas! alas! I die of grief and yet cannot die when I see the falseness of those who should be glad to die for the truth.'

Hence the need for a radical reform which should begin with the higher clergy, because they were the most observed by all; once these were reformed, the good effects would soon be seen in the lives of the humbler clergy. Holy Cardinals were needed to make Christendom one and whole, and enable the Crusade against the infidels to be proclaimed—for she still saw the urgent necessity of the Crusade also. She continued to preach these favourite ideals which she would have liked to implant in the mind of Urban VI, but she judged the time had not yet come to write to him directly. She therefore begged Cardinal Pietro di Luna to speak to the Pope: 'And tell him manfully that he must reform the Church by means of saintly and good pastors, in charity and in truth, not with words only, for if he were but to say, and not do, it would be a bad business'.

Meanwhile, important changes were taking place in Florence. From March 20th till May 20th certain friends and disciples of Catherine were Captains of the Party: Tommaso Soderini, Ristoro Canigiani, Stoldo Altoviti, Alessandro Buondelmonti and Benedetto Peruzzi. They tried by every means to induce the Signoria to make peace. On the first of May Salvestro de' Medici was elected Gonfaloniere of the Republic, 'a man not without ambition, but honest and a sincere lover of his country'. As Gonfaloniere of Justice, he insisted on observance of the Interdict, and suspended, to a certain extent, the confiscation of ecclesiastical property; and Ambassadors were appointed to go to Rome to

render homage to the new Pope and negotiate a peace. Catherine began to see her hopes fulfilled: 'The dawn has come; for the darkness of all those mortal sins, that were committed in publicly saying and hearing Mass, has been lifted, in spite of those who would have prevented this, and the Interdict is being observed', she wrote to Monna Alessa: 'And already I think I see the dawn appear; for our Saviour has enlightened these people who have raised their heads from the perverse blindness of the sin they committed in forcing the celebration of Masses. Now, through divine grace, they observe the Interdict and begin to turn towards obedience to their Father.'

The mission she had so generously fulfilled in Florence was bearing excellent fruits, but she was afraid of over-estimating her success; it was true that her apostolate bore the impress of God, and that divine grace was working through her; but she was not yet sure of achieving her purpose. To her mind everything depended on herself. Her own sins could still hamper, or even destroy, the best beginnings. She herself was the arbiter of the Florentine destiny. The political and economic questions of the hour had no significance for her at all; she, she alone, by her purity, could win from God the desired peace. To be sure, any observer of the conditions of Florence and of the Papacy at that time could also, without the help of religion, prophesy peace in the near future. The Florentine finances were exhausted; the Government of the Eight needed external peace to be able to curb the continual abuse of power by the Guelph Party, which caused much discontent among the citizens and sapped the strength of the State. Her allies had now become a dead weight for the Republic; they were tired of military victories which led to no decisive triumph; they had almost ceased to take any active share in the Florentine war. The propaganda against the Pope had naturally lost its appeal now that the Pope was an Italian. Moreover, Urban VI was asking for much less as war compensation than his predecessor had demanded, thus making negotiations and agreements much easier. The Florentine dream of dominion was melting away, and the Pope himself, threatened by the conduct of his Cardinals, who 'had begun to cherish plans of revolt against him', desired a speedy peace. It was easy to predict peace in the near future. But Catherine was not concerned with such con-

siderations; for her, peace was bound up with religious questions, and the accomplishment of peace would be the result of the sacrifices of Saints. Everything in this world depended on God, and the good that men desired could only be obtained by prostrating themselves before the immensity of divine power, and allowing the spirit of Christ to take possession of their souls. She had sounded the depths of her own soul, and judged all earthly things by the light of truth she found therein. It was clear to her that the Vicar of Christ had nothing to gain by the war with Florence. It was in fact a stumbling-block to the spiritual progress of the Church. The war must therefore be stopped, especially as a very grave danger was now threatening, one that must be faced with all available energy. She had indeed received news from Rome that some of the Cardinals were conspiring against Urban VI; this might be the beginning of schism, which would be a real disaster, because it would lead to at least partial ruin of the Church, and the decay of spirituality. It was news that gave her 'intolerable pain', and heartbrokenly she appealed to Cardinal Pietro di Luna to warn the Pope that he must delay no longer but make peace at once with Florence, 'for it would be too hard to have to fight within and without'. She foresaw the difficulties that the Papacy would find in having to carry on a war on two fronts, and trembled at the thought: this present war was nothing in comparison with what must be avoided at all costs.

While Catherine saw the necessity of peace for the Florentines, and, even more, for the welfare of the Holy See, she hardly noticed that in Florence the Party, as the Guelphs were called, with its tyrannical interference in municipal affairs, was sowing the seeds of future riots and troubles, more painful perhaps even than those caused by the war which was now languishing and near its end. According to Maconi, she did intervene to try to curb the overweening power of the Guelph leaders, but only when they had already stirred the people to revolt. The truth is that during her busy days in Florence she had not been able to give a purely religious character, as she would have wished, to the cause she defended; the men of the Party made use of her very cunningly, so that in the end the people considered her as one of their group, and accused her of dabbling in politics. For this reason, on June 18th, as soon as the quarrel between the

Signoria and the Party came to a head, the Signoria were as bitterly opposed to her as they were to the Guelph leaders. She was the friend, and had been the guest, of Soderini. Pier Canigiani had been collecting money 'from all the artisans, men and women' to buy stones and timber to take up to the 'foot of the slope of San Giorgio' to build there a house for Catherine. She had taken part in the Guelph meetings, and warmly exhorted the people to disobey the orders of the Signoria. Her religious preaching was therefore but a means to disguise political aims against the government, and her sanctity was feigned. In this way various prominent Florentines judged her harshly, calling her a dangerous hypocrite; and when a revolt broke out against the Guelph interference in the conduct of State affairs, the rioters burnt the houses of the Soderini, the Canigiani, and other leaders of the Party, and attacked some Dominican monasteries. They also sought out Catherine's house 'at the foot of the slope of San Giorgio' to take their revenge on her and put her to death. This is an episode of secondary importance in the history of Florence at this time, but it is significant in the life of Catherine, as it is the first time she had to face the threat of death. Among those who went to seek her was one man, more furious than the others, who advanced with drawn sword, probably blaspheming, towards the group of 'Caterinati' who stood around Catherine, praying there in the garden under the Costa San Giorgio. Seeing him, she was at once fearful for her Family, and called to her would-be assailant who was asking which of the women was Catherine: 'I am she. Take me and leave this Family alone.'

Her austere, emaciated looks, the decided tone in which she pronounced these words, her luminous gaze, and perhaps also the presence of various people who might have defended her, calmed the fury of this reckless man. Probably he felt isolated, because his companions, if he had any, had remained behind, inactive; his assurance failed him; perhaps he felt remorse. In any case, he gave up his purpose and retreated. Catherine's gaze may have followed him, wondering, as he went away. She rejoiced and grieved at the same time. She had longed for martyrdom, and now just when her desire was about to be fulfilled, the hand raised to strike had been withdrawn. It was God's will: 'Is it my sins that make me unworthy to shed my blood?' she thought. The sensation of

imminent death had given her indescribable joy: 'for I never yet had felt such mysterious joy'. But the great boon had been denied her; she had been near to martyrdom, but she was still alive and whole. 'My heart was melting for the love and desire I had to lay down my life.' But she was not worthy to cement with her blood one stone of the Mystical Body of the Church. Therefore her 'desire was blissful and painful', and her gaze full of sadness as she watched the retreat of the man who might have been her murderer: sadness because in death she would have found real life. 'Therein was the sweetness of truth, therein was the joy of clear and pure knowledge, therein was the joy of the sweet providence of God; therein was the joy of new martyrdoms, predestined, as you know, by eternal Truth. The tongue could not relate all the good that my soul felt.'

After a few days of burning and sacking and murders, the search for the Guelphs and their possessions ended, but there was still the fear of new riots and new forms of tyranny. Catherine's disciples, somewhat intimidated, advised their Mother to return to Siena, but she refused, saying it was her duty to stay in the territory of the Republic until the news came of a peace between Florence and the Pope: a peace which she said was sure to come. But as it was not prudent to stay in the house that had been attacked, she was advised to change her dwelling. This was impossible for the moment, because her admirers, even her disciples, were afraid to receive her in their houses, or to hide her. At last was found 'a worthy God-fearing man, who intrepidly received her in his house, but secretly, because of the fury of the people and the insurgents'. In hiding, Catherine did not feel at her ease, accustomed as she was to full liberty of action and preaching; moreover, she did not like shunning danger in defending the Church's cause. In the house of her disciple—he was perhaps the tailor Francesco di Pipino, with whom and with whose wife Monna Agnese she afterwards kept up a close epistolary correspondence with the purpose of strengthening them in the religious life—she felt rather too much restricted in her movements, so she decided to leave the city to take refuge in 'a solitary place, still within Florentine territory, where hermits were wont to dwell'. We can only guess the name of this place. Some writers believe it was Vallombrosa, others think it was the Camaldolese hermitage

of Santa Maria degli Angeli, at that time in the environs of Florence; others again think she was at the Convent of San Pietro at Monticelli, also very near the city. The traditional supposition is that she sought shelter at Vallombrosa, and that her meetings with Giovanni of the Cells took place in wild woodland country, and their conversations under the blue vault of the heavens. The Blessed Giovanni must have felt himself engulfed in the torrent of divine love that flowed from Catherine, which explains the very human cry of woe uttered by this hardened ascetic, accustomed to his own self-sufficiency among the rocks and stones, when he heard of Catherine's death: 'How ever shall we live any longer, now that our Mother, our consolation, is dead? What else remains for us to do now, but mourn our desolate state?' It is a sorrow that finds no solace in the songs of the woodland creatures, in the high solitude of the mountains, nor even in the contemplation of sacred things. It is an endless woe: 'I weep for myself, orphaned and abandoned, for the joy of my heart that has been reft from me; therefore my eyes are darkened and dimmed with tears; and in truth there is no remedy or consolation.' His grief makes him see the whole Church weeping and the earth mourning; only the heavens hold high festival because the soul of his friend and teacher has been received by angels' hands. It is touching to find this old man, who had been so happy in his solitude, and so content with his austere thoughts and the denial of all affections, suffering and weeping broken-heartedly for a human being—a Saint indeed, but human. His lamentations indicate that his intercourse with this friend of God had been of recent date—it might well have been at this time, the end of June 1378. This is, however, merely a sentimental and romantic conjecture, not to be accepted as historical fact. We must await the discovery of some new document that may lead to a solution of the problem of where Catherine found shelter during these stormy days. In any case, it is pleasant to think that nuns and monks were found of sufficient courage to receive the Saint in so difficult a moment, when the lives of her hosts might easily be endangered. We do not even know how long she stayed in this 'solitary place'—she must have been impatient to return as soon as possible to Florence, tormented by her longing to see peace established.

In her temporary home she probably heard of the stern measures

that the Government of Florence had adopted against her friends of the Party. She grieved over this and wrote a comforting letter to Soderini. He had lost his house and wealth and had been outlawed by the Commune: these were painful blows, but he must not be cast down or allow himself to doubt divine providence. It was a hard trial to which God had submitted him; he must bear it with fortitude. All that does not directly affect the soul, that is, 'wealth, honours and state, pleasures, health and life itself and all other things that are not really our own, have been lent us for our use; when it pleases the divine goodness they may be taken away from us'. He must firmly believe this, and consider the loss of his house and goods as a medicine for his soul. She knew well that her friend had been punished in this time of tribulation without fault on his part—but that was a reason the more for being patient, 'for patience is the marrow of charity', and charity is founded in Christ. If he had charity he had Christ; moreover, when he arrived in 'our city of Jerusalem, that vision of peace', he would receive the guerdon he had deserved on earth.

In a hermitage the soul rises nearer to heaven, but the agitations of men are far away, as are the great social movements. Catherine, who was essentially an active person, needed to preach, to strive, and to win the cause of peace between the whole Republic and the Holy See. She wished to return to Florence, and as soon as she heard that calm had been somewhat restored, she hastened back there to continue her work of pacification. She found lodging once more in Piazza del Grano, in the same house, it seems, where she had been sheltered a short while before; 'at first she was in hiding there, because of the rulers, who seemed to hate her', but as soon as rumours of a possible and approaching peace spread through the city, and the bitter tempers were softened, she took up once more her public work.

As soon as she arrived in Florence she wrote to the Pope. She had known Bartolomeo Prignano at Avignon, but only slightly; as soon as he was elected Pope she wished to establish closer contact with him, so she sent to the Papal Court some of her own disciples to strengthen her relations with him. She may have desired to write to him before, but had not thought it wise to do so, for reasons unknown to us. Now the times were grave; persecution of the Pope's supporters was bitter in Florence; worse

evils still must be prevented. The most useful thing she could do was to write to Urban begging him to make peace at once. Her own disciples may have requested her to write this, to avoid new persecutions of the Guelphs, or she may have been led to do so by her knowledge of the growing desire for peace of the Florentine people. But the war, the revolutions, the tribulations, the difficulties which Florence and the Church and, one might say, the world (as she knew it) were suffering, had moral causes of infinitely greater importance than merely political or economic considerations. 'Iniquity abounds ever more among your subjects', so that 'the world cannot endure it any longer'. The reason was to be found in the conduct of the priests who 'abound in wretched and wicked vices, so that they infect the whole world'. The pride, sensuality, corruption, simony and avarice of the ministers of the Church were the real cause of the general dissolution. This was a conclusion she had reached several years previously, and she had ceaselessly proclaimed it, with but mediocre results; but now she would insist on it to the Pope, who had serious intentions of reform, and was energetic, and seemed to be a true Vicar of Christ.

So she wrote to Urban VI, repeating to him the ideas she had already often expressed in her letters to Gregory XI and the great ones of the Church. She urged Urban to be 'a true knight and a just shepherd', ready, at the risk of his life, to act manfully in the reform of the Church 'uprooting vice and planting virtue'. The moment had come for him to fulfil the 'longing desires of the servants of God, who die of grief and cannot die'; deeds, not mere words, were needed now; he must cleanse with severity not unmingled with love, and without any servile fear. He must begin by appointing bishops, 'a band of most holy men', and Cardinals who would come to his aid because they were themselves aided by God. It was the evils of the Church that produced all other evils, and the war with Florence was a consequence of these. Poor Florentines! they were little black sheep that had strayed from the fold; but they had not deserved too much severity. 'Be kind', she pleaded with him, 'give them peace, offer them mercy even if it might seem to you, most holy Father, that they did not ask for it in a pleasing way or with heartfelt sorrow for the faults committed, as they should do, and as Your Holiness would like them

to do.' In those days, it was true, there had been grievous persecution of the Party, but this was a transitory evil; tranquillity had now returned, and all invoked his forgiveness. 'Be generous, and you will receive from the sick man all he is able to give you; in fact, you will see that the Florentines will later on be better children than the others.'

Meanwhile, she had heard something about Urban VI's violence towards his Cardinals and other Religious, who thought differently from himself. Fra Giovanni Terzo wrote to her that the Pope had been annoyed with Fra Bartolomeo Dominici because the friar had frankly told him his opinion about some mistakes he had made; Catherine immediately wrote to Urban again, interceding for Fra Bartolomeo, and taking upon herself the consequences of the fault of her beloved son and father in God: 'He, through his fault, and because of his scrupulous conscience, grieved and angered you. . . . I beg you, for love of Christ Crucified, to punish me for any pain he may have caused you; for I am ready and willing to accept any discipline and correction that may please Your Holiness.'

The days passed swiftly, crowded with events, mostly sad ones. The Church was now threatened with schism, and Urban ran grave risks in allowing the war with Florence to continue. He was at Tivoli, somewhat wrathful with the Sacred College, but good-tempered with the Florentine Ambassadors, who also longed for peace, fearing revolts in their own city. Both the Church and the City of the Lily were about to be torn asunder by internal hatred, and had a clear foreboding of this. Peace was as indispensable for Rome as it was for Florence: the negotiations proceeded smoothly.

Catherine did not bother her head with political necessities, and trusted in the efficacy of the letter she had written to the Pope, and hoped God would grant her prayers. She was sure peace would come, and come soon. In fact, on July 15th a messenger from Rome arrived in Florence announcing the forthcoming peace; three days later there arrived on horseback the courier bearing the olive branch with letters for the Signoria from the Pope and their Ambassadors. The olive branch was placed in the window of the Palace, and the great bell rang to summon a Council. There were no more doubts: peace was made. The rejoic-

ing was great; the people sang, shouted, called out blessings. It was the greatest festival and perhaps the most heartfelt, the most overwhelmingly joyous, that had been celebrated for many years. When night fell, torches and fires were lit; every corner of the city, even the dreariest, wore a festive air. Joy filled the hearts of old and young, of the strong and of the sick, of serious, thoughtful men and of the most carefree, of the poor and of the rich. For some hours, at least, the Florentines were one great family, kind and generous in their joy. They ate and drank and exulted. The trumpets sounded shrilly, and the bonfires, burning on the Piazza della Signoria and in other parts of the city and countryside, proclaimed and spread the joyful news. Peace was a gift of such inestimable worth that the people valued it only when it had been lost. Now everyone could tranquilly attend to his own business, industry or trade, that had been suspended and ruined for two years, and work for his own good and that of his family and the State. Everyone could freely receive the Sacraments and hear Mass. There was every reason to rejoice. Those who had a shred of piety thanked God, praised the Pope, and exulted to share in the mysteries of the Church. Catherine, like everyone else, heard the glad tidings and her heart overflowed with joy. She had put part of her soul into that peace: 'God has heard the cry and the voice of His servants, who have for so long cried before His face, and the wailing they have for so long raised over their dead sons', she wrote at once to Sano di Maco, and to the other children of her Family. When she saw the city given over to joy, she was reminded of Biblical images; this peace was like a resurrection; it was a victory over nature. The Florentines had come 'from death to life, from blindness to light. Oh my dearest children, the lame walk and the deaf hear, the blind eyes see and the dumb speak, crying with a great voice: Peace, peace, peace! seeing themselves once more children in the good grace and obedience of their Father, with their hearts at peace. . . . Rejoice, rejoice my dearest children. . . . Rejoice, exult in Christ, sweet Jesus! Our hearts must overflow at the sight of the great and infinite goodness of God. Now peace is made, despite those who would have prevented it. The infernal devil is defeated.'

Her happiness was not to be enjoyed to the full: it was soon cut short. No sooner were the festive torches extinguished, and while

the ashes of the bonfires still smouldered, civil war was already preparing. On July 20th, 'at eleven hours of the day, there was an uprising in Florence'. Once more came days of rioting and devastation. The lowest and poorest classes of the population were determined to have a share in the government, and to take by force what had not been granted to them. They armed themselves, attacked the Palace of the Podestà, took over the government and elected a Signoria of their own: it was the triumph of the 'Ciompi'. The Guelphs were again threatened and in danger; the popular fury had turned against the Party, not because the Guelphs had wanted peace with the Pope, but because they had abused their power, and because they were nobles and 'fat' bourgeois.

Catherine was distressed and disillusioned. The peace she had acclaimed with such enthusiasm had not entered into the hearts of the Florentines. They had desired peace only to have a greater liberty to hate, rob and kill each other. They were factious and destructive. She had not taken any interest in the social struggle between the greater and lesser Guilds, or in the desires and claims of the *popolo minuto*; she had ingenuously believed that when peace came the Florentines would become very pious and ask for nothing else but to live in blissful tranquillity. She was astounded to see that instead of this they were now attacking and murdering each other, immediately after they had been congratulating each other on the proclamation of peace, and the arrival of the olive branch from Rome. She was dismayed. What could she do now amid such confusion, and with so little good will apparent around her, in high or low circles? Perhaps her friends and disciples advised her to leave the city because she also was in danger. We know nothing of her actions or thoughts during those last days in Florence, but the fact that she left her 'Book' and the Papal privileges in the house of her host Francesco di Pipino—soon afterwards she was to send for these—leads us to suppose she had to flee from the city. Gardner thinks she went away on the 2nd August; Joergensen believes she arrived in Siena in the first week in August; we have no document to prove this. When she left Florence, the peace for which she had striven for so long had been achieved, and her mission was concluded. The divine grace had answered her prayer. She understood now that it would not be possible for her to pacify the animosities that were devastating

Florence; she could not bridge the profound divisions between class and class, or transform into benevolence the hatred felt for the Guelphs. She herself was hated, and probably in danger. Why should she remain longer? 'Now it seems that the devil has sowed so much, and so unjustly, in their hearts against me that I do not wish they should add injury to injury, for the more they add the worse their own ruin would be.' Was it perhaps to avoid a still greater shame and evil for Florence, that is, the divine wrath, that she went away?

However, whether she waited until the announcement came that the Pope and the Florentine Ambassadors had definitely signed the peace, on July 28th, or whether she left before, is of no interest; if she was in Florence during the riots of those days we do not know what her movements were. What interests us is her state of mind when she wrote: 'To the Lords Priors of the Guilds and the Gonfaloniere of Justice of the City of Florence'. The letter was written from Siena, but perhaps she added some lines she had dictated when on the point of leaving Florence.

There is an odd divergence between the past tense used in most of the letter, and the present tense we find towards the end. It is not a case of a swift passage from one to the other, such as we often find in Catherine's letters, nor is it careless syntax; it is as if she were thinking and writing in two different periods of time. First we have: 'I set out, by divine grace . . .' and later on: 'I go away consoled because there has been accomplished in me what I set myself in my heart to do when I entered this city. . . . I depart sad and grieving because I leave this city in such trouble.' These last words are too precise for us to believe that she is thinking back in her imagination to Florence, while her body is in Siena; and when she says 'this' city, she must be writing in Florence. Perhaps she dictated these few lines to send them to the Signoria by way of farewell and warning, and then, having to leave in haste, instead of sending them, she took them with her to Siena, and added them to the letter she wrote there, without bothering to make the tenses agree, or to change 'this' city into 'that'.

In any case, this letter shows the anguish of her soul and her bitter disillusionment in Florence, the city she loved so much that she thought of it as her own. Instead of rejoicing at being

readmitted to the fold of Holy Church, instead of thanking God for the blessing of peace between Father and children, the Florentines went on with their riots that caused so much injury and anxiety. They should have waited, contritely, to have their Masses restored, and to prepare solemn processions of thanksgiving, but instead they preferred to take up arms; they were steeped in hatred, howling with rage, hurling themselves upon the innocent. Catherine, turning to the rulers of the city, who had lately assumed power, wrote: 'You Signori, who have assumed the government of the city, you would like to reform everything, substituting class for class, but you only care for your own selves, and you are not thinking of the welfare of the citizens as a whole; you are partisans, and that is why you cannot put the greatness of your city first. You have no love for others, and this makes you powerless. You are unjust, and so you do harm. . . . You wish to reform your city, but I tell you that you will never gratify this desire of yours unless you succeed in casting aside all hatred and rancour of heart, and self-love, so that you care not only for yourselves, but for the common good of the whole city.'

This is a Catholic view of politics—and can be found in Aristotle; Catherine has got beyond her usual simplicity and is urging the government not to aim at the well-being of one single class of citizens, but at the well-being of the whole city. The new men who had seized power were hot-tempered, inexperienced, and in a certain sense childlike; to be able to achieve lasting results, of real use to the state, riper men were needed, experienced, just and disinterested. For example: 'You Signori', she tells them, 'are sending prominent people into exile, without realising that "citizens departing never yet built a firm city".' They were lacking in love and understanding; indeed, if they did not acquire these, together with justice and faith in Christ, they would be unable to reform their city, or keep it in peace. 'I hoped to tell you all this by word of mouth, for the honour of God and your own profit, but as I have heard that you are against me, and I do not wish to draw down on your heads the guilt of persecuting me, I have come away, and what I intended to tell you, if I had been able to visit you, I tell you now by letter. I have left your city very sadly, nevertheless: what can be done through me for your salvation shall be done by me willingly till my death, in spite of

all visible and invisible devils, who wish to hinder every holy purpose.'

The Priors of the Guilds and the Gonfaloniere of Justice, busy as they were in their own schemes of reforming the Florentine Republic, and full of enthusiasm for the political results obtained by the *popolo minuto* and the 'Ciompi', must have paid small heed to this letter. Perhaps when they read it they shook their heads compassionately, with some relief to think that Catherine was no longer in Florence, where she might have stirred up discontent and incited the people to rebel against them.

Chapter X

THE BOOK

IN SIENA Catherine passed some calmer days. She was able to review the results of her labours and rejoice in what had been won for God. Two of her dearest wishes had been fulfilled—at the cost of her tears and blood. She never doubted for a moment that the return of the Papacy to Rome was largely due to her own efforts, and she believed that the peace between Urban VI and the Florentines was God's answer to her insistent prayers. Two other grave tasks remained to be accomplished: ecclesiastical reform and the Crusade; but she had no fear of failure, trusting that Heaven would graciously accept the sighs and longings of her soul. Meanwhile she could permit herself a little time to rest, or rather to plunge deeper into the Precious Blood of Christ, source of all strength, that renews our energies, makes athletes of the weak, heroes of the timid, and reveals to all the secrets of this life on earth and of the life to come. Catherine felt serene. In Florence she had known moments of dismay and bitter sadness at the thought of approaching schism in the Church—but now she was tormented by no sinister fears. She found time to prepare candied oranges which she sent as a gift to the Pope, and she planned to write more pages to add to her 'Book'. She sent someone to fetch it from the house of the tailor Francesco di Pippino in Florence, where she had left it, possibly at the time of her hasty departure.

It may have been during her first week in Siena that she wrote Letter 346 (Tommaseo edition) to Urban VI. The news she had received up to this date was disquieting but not yet catastrophic. This letter shows some signs of anxiety, but she is serene enough to describe with the joy of a delicate 'primitive' painter the gilt and candied oranges she is sending him, and to sweeten the

bitterness of life with honey gathered from the love of Christ, scattering around her thoughts as radiant as light. But suddenly she passes from a more general style, full of images and metaphors, to the mention of a concrete fact: 'the case that has occurred of those wicked and iniquitous men, lovers of themselves, who cause distress to you and your children through their offences against God'. There is a note of sorrow and pain, but immediately afterwards her forthright denunciation gives place to a gentle, forgiving smile, full of trust: 'I hope in the goodness of our sweet Creator, who will remove from us the cause of this sorrow and illumine or confound those who are the cause of it'.

Fawtier maintains that this 'case that has occurred' refers, not to the death of 'several Roman notables' at the hands of the Breton Captain Silvestre Budes, as Burlamacchi asserts, but to the manifesto issued against Urban VI by the schismatic Cardinals, gathered at Anagni, on August 9th, 1378. This is possible, but has not been proved; in fact, judging from the relatively calm tone of Catherine's letter, it seems more probable that the 'distress' caused to the Pope by the 'case that has occurred' referred to the exodus of the Cardinals from Rome, which took place before June 24th. These Cardinals, says Cristoforo da Piacenza, had left Rome 'intending to rebel', which saddened and irritated Urban VI so much that he summoned them to appear before him on a certain day in July 1378, at Tivoli, to give an account of themselves. Catherine may have learnt about this later, and since the Cardinals were intending to rebel but not yet in open rebellion, she may have hoped to be able to smooth out the quarrel. Even the Curia seems to have still hoped for some means of reconciliation. It was therefore quite natural for Catherine, with the incomplete information she had, to trust to God for a settlement of the dispute.

It was impossible for the Pope and his Cardinals to understand one another. They belonged to two worlds far removed from each other, if not mutually hostile. Urban VI was a rigid moralist and somewhat narrow-minded. As an Abbot of reformed monasteries he would have been great; as a Pope he was mediocre. He was right in condemning the corruption of the clergy and their lack of apostolic zeal; but he was deficient in that love that wins hearts and lifts men above themselves. He was austere, honest, dignified; he wanted his priests to follow a simple upright way of

life; he aimed at making the Church pure and exemplary. With all these excellent virtues St Paul would have told him that he was but sounding brass, for he lacked the indispensable Christian virtue: charity. At certain moments his unbending will and unyielding severity gave him an almost monumental grandeur—yet this did not help him to reform others. His wrathful and violent manners alienated most men's sympathies. He sincerely desired, with great enthusiasm and conviction, to reform the morals of his clergy and eradicate simony; but the clergy demanded that Christ's Vicar should first of all reform himself, to give an effective example. The truth is that he desired to dominate others, but he could not control his own choleric outbursts, or his vindictive desires. He was guilty of nepotism, and appropriated church property to get money for his war. He was no psychologist, and lacked tact and finesse. If he had been 'a terrible man' at the right moment, and with intelligence, he would have won great advantages for the Church, but he often attacked the priests unreasonably; he was violent with the Cardinals, he made wrathful accusations, and treated them as filth. 'He began to despise the Cardinals, and heap all sorts of insults upon them, so that after a few days none of them liked him.' As a politician he had no success, and was only able to make peace with the Florentines by giving up advantages that might have accrued to the Holy See. Men said he was very wise in Church matters before he became Pope, when he was Vice-Chancellor to Gregory XI, but probably the merit of this wisdom should be attributed to Gregory, who gave him clear and precise orders which he scrupulously obeyed. Once he was made Pope, he showed neither shrewd intelligence nor grandeur of ideas, and because of his awkward and unaccommodating character he dragged the Church nearer to the greatest disaster that befell her before the Protestant Reformation: the Great Schism. Yet Urban VI thought only of the welfare and greatness of the Church, was most sensitive and conscientious about his duty, loved devout men, admired and listened to Saints, and had just intentions. Unhappily, he set his heart on rigid schemes; his strictness became harshness, his zeal fanaticism, and his sense of duty obstinacy. His hair shirt bit into his flesh, only to render him implacable with those who disagreed with him. He read the Sacred Scriptures

with more evident affection for the Old than for the New Testament. His austerity often led him to cruelty, and his indignation to injustice. He will became his law, and, intolerant of opposition, he thought it was necessary to humiliate whoever would not obey him. It is not surprising that the Chroniclers of that age describe him with scant sympathy: 'He was a learned man and a good cleric; but with an unsteady head, excitable, changeable and arrogant'. One can understand how it was that all forsook him in the end. He was left in a barren solitude, and, after eleven years of unhappy rule, died, as Platina tells us, mourned by very few.

The Cardinals, on the other hand, were *grands seigneurs*, valiant warriors, men of the world. They were used to resorting to compromise in all affairs concerning the Holy See, and they sought for a possible compromise on every occasion. Tolerant with others, they were even more tolerant with themselves, softening Christianity so as to make it easy and pleasant. Why should they insist on a strict morality, when man lives such a brief life here on earth, and is weakness personified? Were there not enough ascetics and Saints in the Church to represent austerity? A Prince of the Church who had a political mission to fulfil, or must command an army, or be a diplomat, may not and must not live a monastic life. These Cardinals loved honours, luxury and pomp, and to acquire these they needed great wealth. How could they procure this except by simony, a practice they were not prepared to give up? Some of them were avaricious, ambitious and vain—delighted in sumptuous banquets, did not disdain the pleasures of Venus, desired to live a life of ease. In Church they prostrated themselves and prayed, but once outside they soon forgot the Gospel, and desired the good things of this world. The sacred and the profane mingled marvellously in their consciences. For them Rome was full of difficulties and dangers, and they longed to return to Avignon. They enjoyed governing their cities, and were interested in festivals, horses, games and armies, wars and reigning dynasties. They were conventional and slaves to etiquette. Pride would not let them allow their prestige to be lessened. In their arrogance they considered themselves the Pope's co-operators, not his subordinates. They were shrewd diplomats and they knew how to use cunning and deceit to achieve their ends and protect themselves.

Men of this sort could not be expected to endure the intransigence, the humiliating impositions and the angry insults of Urban VI. By lineage and because of their greater political skill they considered themselves superior to the Archbishop of Bari, whom they had drawn out of obscurity, but who, now he had been elected Pope, intended to impose his will. They had certainly chosen him, not because they thought him fit to exercise such great authority with propriety, but because the circumstances of the Conclave had obliged them to do so. It is well-known that this Conclave had been held amidst the howls and threats of the populace, demanding a Roman or at least an Italian Pope, and that the Cardinals, mostly Limousins and French, had been terrified. They had known but superficially the Archbishop of Bari; when they chose him to be Pope, at the instance of Cardinal Pietro di Luna, it was chiefly because of his birthplace, because of the offices he had held, and his praiseworthy devotion and care in the direction of state affairs. But the truth was that the Pope had no respect for the Sacred College, and the College heartily returned his distrust and scorn.

The mutual incomprehension between the Pope and his Cardinals soon expressed itself in skirmishes and then in open strife. The Cardinals withdrew to Anagni, where they deliberated how best to bend Urban to their will, or overthrow him. Meanwhile even the Italian Cardinals, Corsini, Orsini and Brossano, who until then had remained neutral observers, on July 26th forsook Urban and went to Vicovaro and thence to Palestrina. Here began colloquies and discussions and negotiations between the Italian and the foreign Cardinals, to try to find some measure of agreement and unity. But they could neither agree nor unite. Then the foreign Cardinals sent a letter from Anagni to Urban VI, inviting him to renounce the Papal throne; on August 9th they composed and issued an encyclical letter, the real manifesto of the Schism. They described Urban as an ambitious man who, out of lust for power, had deceived the Church and was destroying its unity; he was the intruder, the anti-Pope, to be shunned, condemned, opposed. It was true that they, the Cardinals, had elected him, but only out of fear of the Roman populace; now that they had re-acquired their freedom of action they considered they had the right, for the good of the Church, to elect another

Pope. The encyclical was the signal for inevitable division in the Church, and struck desolation into the hearts of all true Christians. It was no longer possible to find a formula of agreement or peace, or even a compromise. People began to take sides for the Pope, or for the Cardinals, and the sinister dispute grew rapidly worse.

Meanwhile, Urban VI, with his despotic character and tactless ways, had alienated, among others, Onorato Caetani, the Count of Fondi, and Otto of Brunswick, the husband of Queen Giovanna of Naples. The dissident Cardinals rejoiced at this, and as Anagni was likely to become unsafe they moved, on August 27th, to Fondi, where they were protected by the Count's militia. In the meantime, Urban had been casting about for supporters and defenders, and on September 18th had created twenty-nine new Cardinals. The Schismatics replied by opening their Conclave, two days later. Even the three Italian Cardinals, who had left Palestrina for Subiaco, now went to Fondi, to take part in the Conclave which was held in the Caetani Palace. They did not themselves vote, but hoped the votes of the other Cardinals would be in their favour. Instead, Cardinal Robert of Geneva was elected. This choice seems a strange one, considering the sinister fame he enjoyed in Italy for having been responsible for the massacre of Cesena. The Sacred College, however, did not worry about offending Italian sensibility; its members were anxiously calculating the political advantages that might result for them from this choice. From the purely political point of view the election was well thought out; Robert was still young, only thirty-six, active and energetic. He also was a *grand seigneur*; he came from an eminent and powerful family, and could boast of being related to the chief princely families of Europe. He spoke several languages, understood the art of government, had shown warlike qualities. Although not French, he was a friend of France and a cousin of Charles V. He was agile of body and mind, courageous, and ready to give his life for the safety of the Church. He was an eloquent speaker, generous, adroit and attractive. Having occupied important offices in the Curia, he knew well the constitution of the Church. Because of all these advantages which he possessed he seemed to be a man who could successfully oppose Urban VI. But he was lacking in piety and an absolute moral sense. He has been well called 'the man of liberal conscience', and

from a superior point of view this was a grave defect; but when the Cardinals were planning to create a strong Church State, not a State Church, they considered that Robert of Geneva was more likely to succeed in this than any of the other Cardinals—that he would maintain the splendour and grandeur of the Church, and gather around him all Catholic Europe. So he was elected and proclaimed Pope on September 21st, 1378, with the name of Clement VII, and on October 31st he was solemnly crowned in the Cathedral of Fondi.

During these grave occurrences Catherine was continuing in Siena her work of spiritual and material aid to the needy; she was writing letters of warning to those most deeply engaged in the dispute, and of encouragement and advice to her friends and disciples, such as the letters to Lodovica di Granello, Neri di Landoccio, Monna Agnese and her husband Francesco di Pipino, a 'grumbling Florentine lady', and Tora Gambacorta. She was revising the pages she had already written of her Book, and was immersed in prayer and meditation. She had ecstasies and visions, which she described or commented upon according to the promptings of the divine voice within her. She wished to complete her Book and wanted it to be an organic whole, the fruit of her deepest religious experiences, a sort of testament to guide disciples and friends when she had left the world. It was to be the crystalline mirror of her life and thought, expressing all her joy in contact with divine love, her exaltation when immersed in Christ, her rapture at her own deification; it was to be, as it were, a projection of her own spirit, perhaps for all times and all places.

While she was intent on her Book she found time to follow the vicissitudes of the Papacy, through the news she received from friars, friends and acquaintances, her official source of information being still Fra Raimondo who was a sincere and enthusiastic Urbanite and had become intimate with the Pope. Mortier tells us that Fra Raimondo was Urban's 'strongest support and most prudent counsellor. He sustained his courage and inspired him with such boldness that he could rally his energies even in moments of weariness, to continue the fight against his foes'; other writers say that Urban called Fra Raimondo '*suum caput, oculos, os, linguam, manus et pedes suos*'. However this may be, it seems to us doubtful whether the Pope accepted Fra Raimondo's advice. Their tem-

peraments were too dissimilar; the future General of the Dominicans was a prudent, tactful man, while Urban had no tact at all. Fra Raimondo was a politician, the Pope most impolitic; Fra Raimondo was calm and knew how to bide his time, while Urban was violent and impulsive. They may have found themselves in agreement in their dislike of the French Cardinals, and in wishing the Papacy to be Italian and remain in Rome; but we are not convinced that the Pope accepted Fra Raimondo's counsels. Moreover, if we were to attribute to the efficacy of the advice given by the Dominican the results of Urban's pontificate, these would hardly redound to the glory of Fra Raimondo, since they did not succeed in averting the Schism. It is more probable that Urban would not listen to any of his counsellors, however wise they might be, because in important matters he always wanted to decide for himself; he availed himself of the help of others only to further his own designs. Fra Raimondo's support was probably limited to encouraging him to be manly in his struggle, and, above all, he must have begged him to surround himself with pious and holy prelates, and to seek the aid of Catherine of Siena. And, in fact, he did seek her aid.

Catherine, for her part, was a faithful interpreter of the political thought of Fra Raimondo. The letters he sent to her were not merely informative; they contained advice, judgments, proposals for action. The events themselves had to be presented to her in such a way as to induce her to enter the struggle on Urban's side. Who better than Catherine could try to isolate the schismatic Cardinals and work for the victory of the Urbanite cause? She did not enter into the whys and wherefores of the quarrel, did not weigh carefully the actions, circumstances and intentions of the Cardinals, or admit that there had been attenuating circumstances; it was enough for her to know that the Cardinals had rebelled against the Pope they had themselves formally elected; therefore they had sinned against God, and transformed themselves into devils. Had they elected him because they were frightened? This motive could not be proffered as an excuse. According to Catherine, Christ's priests must never act out of fear—in fact, they must not know what fear is. Besides, having elected him they had crowned him and sworn allegiance to him; Urban VI was therefore the true Vicar of Christ, and they were

proved to be liars and persecutors of the just and the good.

Urban VI, as the Vicar of Christ, had the right to demand all things of all Christians, who, without exception, were bound to submit to him and obey him. Here was Onorato Caetani, for example, quarrelling with the Pope: in Catherine's eyes a deplorable act of rebellion. What did it matter if Urban unjustly refused to restore to the Count of Fondi the florins the Count had lent to Gregory XI? Was it a sufficient reason for rebelling against Urban simply because he had been deposed by the Government of Campania? To the Vicar of Christ we owe nothing but obedience: 'Even if he were such a cruel father to us as to hunt us in shame from one end of the world to the other, making us suffer every imaginable pain, we must still neither forget nor deny this truth'. Here also Catherine does not consider man as a citizen or politician, but only as a Christian, judging every action according to an absolute spiritual principle. Was Onorato Caetani not a Christian? Therefore it was his duty to obey the Pope on every occasion. By his rebellion he had descended to the level of a beast, and was bringing about his own spiritual death and that of others. For this reason she wrote to him in indignation and sorrow. In her letter accusations and rebukes spring out abundantly amid the allegories and images. She wanted to pierce the Count's conscience and humiliate him, but to save him too; she struggled to convince him of the injustice of his revolt, and of the necessity of repenting his sin and seeking his salvation. He had become too closely connected with the schismatic Cardinals, 'those who had contaminated the faith and denied the truth'; now it was time to detach himself from them and to become once more a faithful subject of Urban. He must make haste to subdue all self-love, assume the yoke of humility and obedience, and try by every means to avert God's terrible impending judgment. But this letter, even if it reached the Count of Fondi, had no effect whatever.

Towards the middle of September 1378 the state of the Church had become wretched indeed. Most of the clergy had abandoned Urban VI. The anti-Pope was about to be chosen. The news that came from Rome or from Fondi to the various Christian centres was about divisions, unrest and struggles, and brought dismay. The bonds that held ecclesiastics together began to loosen, while order in the hierarchy became confused. The bishops were uncer-

tain whether to follow Urban or the Cardinals; in the monasteries and convents, and among the secular clergy, all were taking sides. Everywhere was uncertainty for the morrow, diminution of authority, confusion, demoralisation. In Siena Catherine observed all this and suffered. The whole world seemed topsy-turvy, and there was no longer a corner where one could find peace: 'As it is here, so it is everywhere else, and especially in this city of ours where in the temple of God, which is a house of prayer, they have made a den of thieves—and caused such wretchedness that it is a wonder the earth does not swallow us up'. So she wrote on September 18th to Urban VI, agitated and weeping with emotion. But the bitterness she felt did not weaken her courage; the words of encouragement to the Pope flowed vigorously from her pen. For her Urban was an innocent target for the treacherous blows of vicious and furtive men: he was the champion of truth and justice, while they were the sons of iniquity. There was no time to be lost—the dangers that were threatening were many, and very grave; resolute action was necessary. He must be a manly Pope—he must wield the knife of the hatred of vice and strike without pity: 'O most holy and most sweet Father' (that 'most sweet' addressed to Urban VI strikes a discordant note), 'now is the time for you to draw this sword so that Your Holiness may put an end to their disorderly living and wicked ways and conduct'. He must not 'countenance their corruption' but be a severe judge and strike hard. 'May the starry flower of holy justice shine fearlessly in your heart!' She told him she suffered for the Church and for him and wished to be near him, to exhort him to fight, and to share with him the sufferings and the joy of battle. The idea of battle excited her spirit and made her thrill with desire: 'I want no more words, but to find myself on the field of battle, suffering and fighting by your side for truth, even unto death, for the glory and praise of God's name and for the reform of Holy Church'.

The news she receives is more and more disquieting: at Fondi the schismatic Sacred College has elected the anti-Pope. On October 5th she writes again to Urban, inspired by holy wrath, but curbing her indignation as well as she can. Their enemies strike grievous blows, but in the long run what can they hope to achieve? Holiness, truth and light will always triumph, and since

the Cardinals and their allies are the negation of these 'the blows of the wicked, wretched lovers of themselves will not wound you; they will not destroy the affection of your heart, nor the Bride, Holy Church. You, the true Pope, are Christ-on-earth and in truth no one can harm you.' She urges him, however, to plunge into the thick of the fight. Fear must not weaken his action: 'God fights for His Church, which you represent; you will see that Christ will turn against your foes the poisoned darts they hurl against you. But you must take refuge at once in the wounded side of Christ, because only there can you find the strength and the counsel you need to overcome those devils. . . . Let your soul expand in the sweet joy of charity without any fear, and victory will be yours.' Human help is always unsure and ineffectual, and never more so than at this moment. Our times are tragic, but nevertheless we shall win through: 'if we hope in God with all our heart, all our love, all our strength'. He must beware: the enemy is powerful, and uses every means to conquer him. 'I know that people plot against you; be prudent; observe every precaution with regard to yourself.' He must provide himself with a body-guard of good and virtuous priests—she also would like to be with him. 'I shall know no peace until I find myself in the presence of Your Holiness; because I want to give my blood and my life, and consume the marrow of my bones for Holy Church.' She is seized once more by a strong desire for martyrdom; she feels she was born to fight and suffer; she wishes to be a warrior in Urban's cause.

She wrote to the Pope to fortify him in his purpose and strengthen his courage, but she felt impelled to write also to the three Italian Cardinals who had taken part in the Conclave during which the anti-Pope had been elected. So she wrote them a long letter, rebuking them but at the same time trying to recall them to their duty. She could not understand the motives for their conduct; even setting aside the religious principles involved and judging them from a purely human standpoint, she could find no justification for their actions. In the case of the French Cardinals she could find some sort of explanation, if not excuse, in their love for their own land, but what love could have induced the Italian Cardinals to revolt, except self-love? 'Humanly speaking, with Christ-on-earth an Italian and you yourselves Italians, you cannot

have been moved by love for your country, like the other Cardinals, and therefore I can only see self-love in all this.' In her fierce condemnation she found words that bit, and thrusts that drew blood. The three Cardinals had loved the body more than the soul; therefore they had preferred corruption to the fullness of life; a real darkness of the soul had fallen upon them—indeed, a mental and spiritual decay. What was our body? Here she echoed the words of Innocent III in his *De Contemptu Mundi*: 'Our corporal life is so ugly that as long as we live we stink all over. We are merely sacks full of excrement, the food of worms, the food of death.' The three Cardinals had made themselves a bed for worms: her disgust was so great that she started attacking them at the beginning of her letter—while usually she began in a more general way, with forewords and spiritual prefaces, meditations or remarks, leading up to reproofs or accusations. 'I write to you', she said, 'because I hope you will come forth from the shadows and disassociate yourselves from death; I have called you "Fathers", not because you are such now, but because I hope you will once again become "Fathers" when you return to be united in faith and perfect obedience to Pope Urban VI, in whose obedience remain all those who have light by which they recognise the truth, and, recognising it, embrace it.' Having forsaken the Pope, they have become contaminators of the faith and have spread abroad such a stench that they have made the whole world stink. 'Now then—do not tell me stories about that Conclave; you have deliberately chosen and crowned Urban VI and you have promised allegiance to him; either you elected him in all sincerity, in which case you are now reprobates to deny him, or you elected him falsely, in which case you have always been liars and idolaters. The truth is that you could not bear the Pope's reproaches and corrections, and so you have rebelled. I should like at least to enlighten your consciences a little; I should like to persuade you to acknowledge your fault, and I should like you, in all humility, to return to the obedience of the true Vicar of Christ. The fold is open; it awaits you—go in. Why do you run away from it? Draw close, instead. You will be received with mercy by Christ-in-Heaven and by Christ-on-earth, in spite of the wicked sin you have committed.'

But it was not enough to write to the Italian Cardinals—it was

necessary to try to prevent Giovanna, the Queen of Naples, from supporting the Schismatics. Catherine had as yet no certain information about the Queen's decision, but she considered it was her duty at least to warn her not to enter into a league with Urban's enemies. The Count of Caserta and Niccolò Spinelli had represented Giovanna at Fondi, but there had been no formal adherence, and she could not therefore be openly accused. The rumours that circulated in Rome, which Fra Raimondo passed on to Catherine, were still unreliable. Had the Queen really wanted the election of the anti-Pope? Was she seriously supporting the Schismatics, or was her attitude merely a feint to gain time, so that she could observe the turn of events? Statements and denials followed each other in quick succession in those days, and Catherine could not openly rebuke the Queen, as she would have done if her information had been sure. She wrote diplomatically, saying little, making general observations and attacking the schismatic Cardinals 'to make the Queen understand', as Tommaseo observes; she did not accuse her directly; in fact, her whole letter was one of courteous persuasion; if she hinted at disapproval, that was for the future in case the Queen should choose to side with the anti-Pope. Her rebukes were gentle, her threats closely veiled. She meant to prevent Giovanna from declaring herself Urban's enemy, and she asked of her, if not allegiance, at least neutrality, and attendance on God's enlightenment of her soul. She wrote to her because she was fond of her and wanted to satisfy her own conscience. It was the Cardinals who were poisoning souls, and against them she hurled her darts. She would willingly have been even more violent, for she wished to resort to 'deeds rather than words' against them; but not being able to resort to deeds she took up the weapon of prayer, which she hoped would dissuade the Queen from her intention of protecting the Schismatics, and induce her to remain loyal to Urban VI and support him in the grievous conflict of the hour.

This external activity did not draw her away from her religious meditations, and if she suffered moments of bitterness, or even of dismay, she very soon regained her serenity and confidence. The deeds of men, even the gravest and most scandalous, not only did not disturb the peace of her spiritual life, but in certain moments seemed of trifling importance compared with those eternal truths

that God revealed to her in the depths of her soul. She detached herself from the external world, whenever she could, to lose herself in the warmth and light that welled up in her soul and restored all to harmony. Here she found true wealth, and power, and communion with the divine; here was the highest bliss. As soon as she began to meditate, her meditation changed to contemplation, and this to ecstasy: ecstasies of Paradise, which thrilled her with joy.

How could she impart to others, in a lasting medium, her visions and ecstasies? How could she give permanent form, for her own benefit and for the benefit of others too, to the sweetness and grandeur of God's words, which she heard so clearly uttered within her, but which, when she tried to repeat them, seemed to fade and lose their power? Her friends and disciples were continually asking her to teach them, and she had nothing of greater worth to leave them than the faint echo of the words spoken to her by Christ. In moments of doubt or dryness, would it not be well, for her own sake too, to be able to re-read, gathered together in a volume, the sum of her spiritual experiences? The compilation of this book became a necessity for herself and for others. It was true that in her letters she had often given free play to the exuberance of her feelings, but many of these letters had been written, not in response to her own need for self-expression, but for special occasions, and in spite of their efficacy—naturally, she knew that her letters exercised a profound influence on those who received them—they were, for the most part, neither planned nor well-constructed. She now desired to compose a book that should contain and hand down to future generations the message of words that she believed God had spoken to her. It must be a book of solid doctrine, for the use of all the faithful. She thought of it as a new presentation of traditional Christian *motifs*, the centuries-old teachings of the Church, as these had re-echoed in her soul with a resonance peculiarly her own.

We do not know for certain when she first thought of composing this volume. We find the first draft of the book, a 'Dialogue', in Letter 272 (Dupré-Theseider edition) which Catherine sent to Fra Raimondo when she was in the Valle dell' Orcia during October 1377. Eugène Dupré-Theseider has very carefully studied the genesis of the 'Dialogue', and, basing his research on

Fawtier's well attested conclusions, has clearly proved that Catherine had begun to work on her book in October 1377, and that it was completed before she heard of the election of the anti-Pope Clement VII, that is, before the end of September, 1378.

It was a great labour that Catherine undertook. She had to amplify and modify the structure of the original 'Dialogue'. She had to compile and to compose: to gather together the best material from her own letters, select with care, concentrate some passages, expand others, and co-ordinate the whole. By herself she could not do all this, and therefore she availed herself of the help of her disciples, particularly of those who were men of letters or theologians. It was a collaboration controlled by herself, and when, as often happened, she perceived that new sections must be added, then the task was hers alone. Some of her experiences were recalled and found useful for her book; her daily intercourse with men and women suggested various and original ways of instruction; the political and ecclesiastical events of the day offered her a pretext for new reflections; her prayers revealed new meanings and analogies, her raptures included visions that could usefully be related. But before adding anything she felt the need to read over again, or have read to her, what she had written and compiled in the preceding months. Therefore at the beginning of 1378 she sent to ask Francesco di Pipino for her book, adding: 'because I want to write certain things'. She wanted the book to be a complete whole, and so, in fact, it is. Every now and then the style halts a little, the colouring fades, and the inspiration seems to flag; but the purposefulness of the entire work never fails, and if we read all the 'Dialogue' without a break we have the impression of a homogeneous whole. It is true that some passages are long and monotonous; yet they grip our attention by means of some revealing words that echo in our soul lovingly and clearly. The 'Dialogue' has not the fascination of some works written by profound mystical writers; it does not strike fear into our hearts, or cast us wretched suppliants to the dust. There is a gentle enchantment in it that makes us despise the life of the senses, and draws our souls towards the mystical life. In the pauses of her starkest and most vigorous passages we overhear a melody sung by an entrancing voice. The whole book has a calm and a serenity that suggests visions of spring landscapes, lit by silvery-gold

sunlight, in which the green trees and the fields of corn have the freshness of springing life. Her world is this world of men, and her eloquence is the result of burning experience. Catherine loved men, every man and all men, and gave herself wholly for their well-being.

At times, her outpourings of prayer affect us more than the dialectic she attributes to God, but the former is but the consequence of the latter, with which she fed and formed her mind. There is in the 'Dialogue' a sort of duel between the cold, logical reasoning of God and the loving impulse of the soul, but this apparent contrast is due to Catherine's desire for equilibrium, which finds its solution in a harmony between the mind and the heart. Gardner found something abrupt and abstract in the words attributed to God, as if they were mysterious syllables dropping from above the clouds through a great silence; in listening to Him our attention is strained, and this leads to a certain monotony. There is an element of truth in this, but it is also true that the colder tones offset the warmer, and that in a well conceived composition both are necessary. In the 'Dialogue' the word of God is didactic and explanatory, expressed with logical precision; nevertheless, it unites and merges also with the longing and anxiety of the soul that seeks Him. There is therefore an alternating rhythm of serene theological thought and imperious impulses which seek to break the bonds of earthly life to plunge the soul into the mystery of God.

We have at the same time the close reasoning and equilibrium of a positive intellect that deals with virtues and vices, with the significance of this earthly life and with theological and ecclesiastical questions, and outbursts of feeling expressed in words which they endow with new meanings, to understand which one must share in that world in which Catherine lived: a world syllogistically unknowable, but one that can be experienced through an impulse of the spirit, and whose light and heat pervade our souls as soon as we abandon ourselves to it. It is the kingdom of grace, the realm of our deification. No precise or definite words can describe it because it is vision beyond all sight, and feeling that eludes definition. When experienced it produces an extraordinary state of mind, which is often expressed in terms of wonder, trembling, enchantment—just as exclamations and interjections

are at times the only appropriate means of describing an experience that is not linked with the world of the senses: 'that the eye that sees does not see, the ear that hears does not hear, the tongue that tells does not tell—the hand that touches does not touch, the feet that go there do not find'. The mystics try hard to express the world they have experienced with such transports of joy, but all they can do is to endow their words with a breath of life, which enables them to be immediately understood by mystical natures while remaining meaningless for all others. For this reason, it seems useless to apply aesthetic theories, however brilliant, to the writings of mystics; if it is at least partially true that poets are wholly understood only by other poets, it is even more true that mystics are understood only by mystics.

Catherine takes us with her 'Dialogue' to the threshold of the Unknowable, pausing on the way to consider man and his nature, trying to arrive at an understanding of various religious, moral, theological, political and social problems of her time—some of them problems of all times.

God created man by an act of love, and therefore we are all 'trees of love', and, if we wish to live, we must love. But the natural effusion of love may be poured out either on ourselves or on our neighbour. One love excludes the other. In the former we have self-love, which is a perversion of real love, and the root of all evil. 'All the scandals and hatred and cruelty and all evil proceed from this perverse root of self-love. It has poisoned the whole world, and sickened the mystical body of Holy Church and the universal body of the Christian religion.'

True love, instead, is directed towards God, but actually it is poured out to our neighbour because, however much we love God, we can never love Him enough. So the degree of our love for our neighbour represents our degree of love for God: 'To Me you cannot render the love that I require of you; so I have given you this means of loving your neighbour so that you may do to him what you cannot do to Me; that is, you may love him fearlessly, freely, and without expecting any reward'. This identification becomes even closer because it becomes one thing with divine love: 'love of Me and love of your neighbour is one and the same thing; and as much as the soul loves Me it loves him, because the love of him comes from Me'. It is natural, therefore, that the soul

enamoured of God should try to be of service to the whole world: 'In common and in particular, little or much, according to the disposition of him who receives and the burning desire of him who gives'.

Love is the central spring of human life, and when it becomes purified so as to be totally disinterested, and learns to love for love's own sake, it is charity: that is, a fire that comes from God and takes possession of heart and mind, and produces all the virtues. These are the foundation of life; philosophers have extolled them, Saints have practised them to a heroic degree; there can be no solid social construction without them. The virtues are alive and give life, because they are rooted in charity; just as our love is of worth in so far as it is directed towards our neighbour, so virtues also become perfect only through our service to our neighbour. Thus there is formed a circle through love, charity, our neighbour and the virtues, a circle fed and vivified by love, that renders man pleasing to God: 'just as with the woman who has conceived a child within herself—until she brings him to birth before the eyes of creatures, her husband will not believe that he has a son; so I, God, am the Husband of the soul, and until the soul brings to birth her child, virtue, in charity towards her neighbour, showing it to all, in general and in particular as is necessary, as I told her to do—until she does this, I say, she has not conceived virtue'.

But charity, although given a pre-eminent place among the virtues, is only acquired through the use of the intellect. This is to some extent Thomist intellectualism, but it is also a conception that springs naturally to Catherine's mind. 'The intellect is the noblest part of the soul.' It is superior to the will and has direct knowledge; nevertheless it does not dominate of itself: 'the intellect is moved by affection and nourishes affection'. Here one sees Catherine's innate desire for harmony. She considers the life of man as the result of carefully measured faculties; repeating the Augustinian conception of the soul as formed of intellect, will and memory, she balances the powers in such a way as to produce a useful mutual interchange and support. Thus the intellect sees the will of God; love is the substance of man; the memory retains the fruits of both. When life is conceived of in this way we no longer find a contradiction when she affirms that man can only live by love, and then goes on to say that love follows knowledge, be-

cause the two faculties necessarily supplement each other; thence she concludes that 'he who knows most loves most, and he who loves most receives most'. This is knowledge of a theological-moral character, at times psychological, never philosophical: a knowledge that is completed by the increase of charity; that is, knowledge in God through the eye of the intellect, which is of no worth unless it expresses itself in virtue: virtue that means renunciation, self-sacrifice, dedication to others. In giving all of ourselves we find ourselves, and through a spiritual process we rise from others to God, just as before we had descended from God to others. In any case, man needs to act: 'whether he wishes it or not, he can accomplish nothing except by expressing charity in action'. Alas! generally our activity is wholly directed towards our personal gratification; thus it is changed into self-love, and this prevents us from raising ourselves to God, because self-love 'is a cloud that steals the light of reason', and of faith also, since faith is bound to reason; if one is lost the other is lost too. But real love teaches discretion: that is, 'the real knowledge that the souls must have of itself and of Me (God)'. Since the activity of man on earth is directed by charity, it follows that all the virtues are included in this. We have, in fact, patience, 'the Queen who rules over all the virtues because she is at the heart of charity', and patience, accompanied by perseverance, is linked with humility. Humility is the nurse of obedience, and the foster-mother and nurse of charity. The need to establish the close interdependence of the virtues and to bind them to each other in one whole makes Catherine fall into contradictions, as when she says that charity is the mother of all the virtues (therefore mother of patience and humility among these) and then says patience is the heart of charity and humility the foster-mother and nurse of charity. But these are contradictions soon lost sight of, when considered symbolically, and it is possible, with but slight adjustments of the sense, to preserve intact the unifying bond between all the virtues. Catherine's desire to unify all, and to include every good thing and every perfect thing in the unity of God, is what makes the greatness of her conception. The virtue, she says, without which it is impossible to live an individual or social or political life, is justice, the animating soul of divine and civil laws, the arbiter of all relations between men, and between states.

These virtues, animated by love, are power and perfection, but do not of themselves permit a man to pass beyond the state common to all Christians. When they are active, they make people, families, cities and States what they should be; but they do not constitute a final goal. The human spirit has far greater powers, for it may reach out to the divine light, and be so filled and purified and enflamed by this as to feel possessed by grace, which enables it to share in the divine life. But unhappily this state, that should be normal to all, is shunned or despised by the majority of men; and, even if it is true that 'the soul by its own nature always desires the good', it often strays from nature or is violently torn away. When in this way the soul is estranged from the life of love, and prefers to sail alone on a stormy sea that has no shores or points of reference, all sense of direction is lost, and the soul suffers shipwreck and is drowned in sin, or rather, according to what Catherine has learnt from St Augustine and St Thomas, it is drowned in nothingness which, being null and void, annuls the soul. It is not surprising that when we are estranged from love we are beaten by furious and adverse waves, and become a prey to anxieties, pains and sorrows, so that the whole earth, because of sin, is plunged into sadness. Instead of virtue men have chosen fleshly lusts, envy, avarice, pride, cruelty, arrogance—in fact, all the vices that cloud the clear light of the soul; we follow a wretched, bloody way of life, and when we laugh it is but to hide the spasms of pain caused by the cancer that gnaws our vital parts. Earthly life has been made corrupt, and even the Church has fallen under the dominion of self-love, so that she has lost her pristine beauty and now shows a leprous countenance.

Catherine shudders when she considers the corruption of the Church, and when she sees the depravity of the priests she trembles with indignation. Christ has been betrayed, nature has been perverted; purification by fire is needed, reform *ab imo*. She examines the Church's sores and diagnoses them mercilessly. There is something of Michelangelo's sublime wrath in her gesture of condemnation. It is true that in her pages it is God Himself who is speaking, and therefore strictness and severity are *de rigueur*; but in this Dialogue it is her own thought that God is approving: His verdict is hers. There is no other way: either the whole extent of the evil must be shown, to be cured, or the Church will perish.

But the Church cannot perish: therefore its salvation must be sought; its ministers, mostly corrupt and wicked, must be converted. God wills this, she wills it. One way is to intercede in prayer for them and for all men: she must suffer and pray. Her anguish is for their salvation, and must in the end persuade God. Has He not promised the renewal of His Church? His voice has been heard: 'Take then your tears and sweat and bring them to the fountain of My divine charity, you and My other servants; and with these cleanse the face of My Bride, for I have promised you that by this means her beauty shall be restored'.

The terrible judge has become a victim, longing for the sacrifice. She feels upon herself the entire responsibility of the Church, whose salvation will depend on her own efforts. No one else must judge or condemn. The priests, even if wicked and corrupt, are sacred because they belong to the Church. Only Christ and His Vicar on earth may punish them. They are the workers in the Christian vineyard, and depend on the supreme eternal Worker; if they do not work, or if they spoil the vines, God alone can punish them. The Church is the earthly image of life in Heaven, and He who reigns in Heaven rules the Church. The Church must spread continually until it has gathered together the whole world: in this way the unity and continuity of the world of men would be united to the divine world. Has Christ not made of Himself a Bridge between earth and Heaven, so that men may share in both worlds?

But the reality is far otherwise; men seek to gratify their senses and care nought for perfection. Beneath this Bridge flows a rushing river, and the great majority of men have preferred and still prefer to go down into the river and trust themselves to that fickle stream. 'The water knows no pause, everyone is drowned that enters it.' The Bridge rises like an apocalyptic vision; our imagination sees it soar higher and ever higher till it is lost in the infinite, then bend down to reach the earth again, like a great celestial Way, coloured grey and russet; it is solid and yet aerial, it has the constancy and the vibrations of the stars. It arouses wonder and trembling fear; it is the Bridge thrown across the abyss by God, for the salvation of men. Its stones are the virtues, cemented with the Blood of Christ. There is nothing dangerous or treacherous about it: 'for all the faithful may cross it easily,

and without any servile fear'. We contemplate it in awe; over it pass a few wayfarers, glowing in azure light; beneath it swarms the crowd, lost in the grey, tossing river waves.

All those who aim at a certain degree of perfection cross over the Bridge, which leads to a door and ends with three enormous steps. Christ awaits them there; Catherine's image of Him is of extraordinary grandeur, far larger than those gigantic Byzantine Christs which, in the apses of some churches, fascinate us so much that once we have seen them we cannot detach our gaze from those faces or those eyes. The three steps lead to the feet of Christ, then to His side, then to His mouth: this last step must be climbed by whoever would arrive at 'great perfection'.

Real knowledge begins at the feet of Christ. This is religious and mystical—not philosophical knowledge. Catherine's God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—not the God of Aristotle or of St Thomas Aquinas. When Père Deman writes that she 'is moved and thrilled by those conceptions that other minds can hold with indifference', he is right if by conceptions he means the truths of faith that she learns in God. To her might be applied St Anselm's '*credo ut intelligam*' in its strictest sense. She attaches importance to the intellect, not because it is itself capable of discovering truths, but because it can, to a certain extent, understand the Christian faith as accepted by the soul. Truth dwells in God, not in the human brain, and man is allowed to raise his mind to God to know in Him what he has already himself begun to believe through revelation. 'She encourages us to acquire knowledge', certainly, but one must beware of confusing her knowledge, which is mystical, with that of a closely reasoning theologian. She accepts the teaching of Christ and believes that the love of virtue and the hatred of vice will lead us to the 'house of self-knowledge', and that prayer raises us 'so that the intellect may receive the light'. This is true knowledge, Catherine tells us, but is it not perhaps a divine illumination granted to our intellect? There are no syllogisms here, no logical and strict deductions. God gives us knowledge of the truth, and according to this we must regulate our conduct in this life. It is always faith that is supreme; we are far from philosophical reasoning, far even from the intellectual world of the theologian. Catherine agrees with the theologian in her principles, which are after all common to

the whole Christian world—she is opposed to him both in method and in her general conception. Père Deman draws a clever portrait of Catherine as an eager thinker and reasoner, but when we study her writings it is her love and fervour that strike us most and her salient characteristic is her tireless spiritual creativeness. Her thought is certainly active and lively, but it serves to clothe the warm throb of her religious feelings, or is the expression of her mystical experiences judged with a calm mind. For her, knowledge is the experience of the divine, from which we deduce that perfection gives birth to knowledge, which in its turn inspires and produces perfection, which has no limit in this earthly life. 'There is no one in this life, however perfect he may be, who may not grow to greater perfection.' It is not enough to accept the Blood of Christ as the means of purification, and to acquire virtues and experience love; it is necessary for the soul to be endlessly striving to spiritualise itself and at every moment to try to burst out of the limits of this earthly life. Union with God, when it is achieved, is by progressive degrees, so that an earlier degree of grace is considered an imperfection when compared with that which is to follow, and growing grace finds all previous degrees insufficient. In its God-ward flight the soul must not loosen the bonds that hold it to its neighbour; it must bind them closer and stronger. The straining of the soul after God refreshes the faculties and leads to a still more loving union with all mankind. Prayer, which is the inner impulse of the soul, seeks to maintain contact with both extremes: Man and God. Therefore real prayer is not a piling of words upon words, and although vocal prayer also is necessary, it is not sufficient in itself to comprehend the whole world of man and God. For this is needed that holy desire which is continual prayer: that is, mental prayer.

To rise above oneself and commune with the divine—even this is not yet full perfection. There are joys produced by almost sensible proofs of a world beyond; there are spiritual consolations that fill the soul, there are celestial visions that bring their own bliss. Even these, however, do not bring about the state of intimate union with God; it is a lofty and most dangerous state, because in it the soul may easily love God, not for Himself, but for the joys that come from this union, that is, love God for its own sake. 'It happens as to that man who works in a garden,

and as he delights in this garden he rests from his work there. He thinks he is just resting from his work, but he is really resting in the joy that the garden gives him.' Real union, instead, is often barren of delights, and sets up such a delicate balance of joy and sorrow that both become indifferent to the soul; when a man reaches this perfection 'he holds all things in equal reverence, the left hand as much as the right, tribulation as much as consolation, hunger and thirst as much as eating and drinking, cold and heat and nakedness as much as clothing, life as much as death, honour as much as dishonour, and affliction as much as recreation. In all things he is solid, firm and immovable, because he is founded on the living rock.' So, having overcome the desire for earthly goods and events, the soul finds satisfaction and joy everywhere: 'It enjoys all things and finds in all the fragrance of the rose'. Hence the imperative command: 'Rejoice even in tribulation'. This state is reached by transcending the senses, not by destroying them; the soul acquires a more intense sensibility which is shown on a higher level; 'where the soul feels both bliss and pain; bliss because of the union with Me and the joy of divine love; pain because of the injury it sees done to Me'. Thenceforth the trembling soul will be living in Christ: 'Dwelling in Him you will follow His teaching; following His teaching you will share in the substance of this Word, that is, you will share in the eternal Deity united to humanity, drawing from this union a divine love that will intoxicate the soul'.

But still greater heights may be reached: 'the souls arrive at the door, raising their mind to Him, bathed and inebriated with the Blood, burnt with the fire of love; they enjoy in Me the eternal Deity which is for them like a peaceful sea, where the soul finds such union with Me that the mind can make no movement save in Me'. Here occurs that mystical phenomenon which the writers of tracts call the '*legamento*'. 'When all those powers (intellect, memory, affection) are gathered and joined together, and the body, immersed and drowned in Me, loses all feeling . . . all the limbs are bound and held by the bond and feeling of love'. In this way love takes possession, invades, holds, enflames and consumes the soul, so as to reduce it to a flaming brand 'all burnt in the furnace'.

Nearly all gross material has been burnt away; nevertheless, an

eternal contrast remains between the soul and body, and the soul can still control bodily phenomena: 'When she felt her soul renewed in the eternal Deity, the holy fire of love within her flamed so hot that she sweated water because of the straining of the soul against the body . . . she scorned this because she desired to see her body sweat blood instead'. For blood had the power to ransom, and brought her nearer to the sacrifice of Christ, and by sharing in this sacrifice she would play a more active part in the salvation of men: 'And therefore I want you now to seek a remedy by sweating blood'. Thus God replies to her when in her distress she accuses herself of being the cause of all the evil in the Church and in the world. But there comes a moment when the soul loses this control over the body. It becomes etherealised, frees itself from all that would weigh it down, rises above the body, as light as air; no force now can hold it back. The ecstasy becomes more intense; God, like a fiery breath, draws out to Himself the innermost soul; there is a violent shock of severance, and the soul becomes still more enflamed with love. Nevertheless it is still able to remember the body, and can glance at it and see that 'it lies motionless, overcome by the power of the spirit'.

The soul now takes wing and soars to the divine, and enters an atmosphere of flame, so remote from life on earth that it sees it now but dimly, as in a dream, faint and far away. Reality is now fullness of ardour and joy, and the almost invisible thread that still binds soul and body is forgotten. The soul contemplates new worlds and is never weary of contemplation; it wants to draw ever nearer to God. Although it does not see the life beyond as clearly as it will see it after death, yet it experiences as it were the beginning of deification, because true servants of God 'arrive at My eternal vision, where they see and enjoy Me in truth, the soul separated from the body, as I told you when I spoke of the bliss the soul received in Me. This is that excellent state that the soul, while still mortal, enjoys with the immortals. Hence it often happens that it arrives at such a union that it does not know whether it is in the body or out of the body, and enjoys this foretaste of eternal life, because of its union with Me, and also because its own will is dead. It was because its own will was dead that it was able to reach union with Me—for otherwise it

could not have had perfect union. Now such souls enjoy eternal life, saved from the hell of their own will, which gives a foretaste of hell to those who live according to their own fleshly lusts, as I have told you.'

It would seem that the height of bliss to be enjoyed on earth has been attained; but this is not true, because the soul proceeds in its self-deification and no end can be assigned to this process. The divine light becomes ever clearer to the eye of the mystic, and the heat is ever more intense. Such an infinite perfectibility is almost inconceivable for us, and so we feel the need to set pauses or definite limits, but the mystic who wants to achieve the closest possible union with God considers all in terms of the infinite; he knows he can never pause, and his thirst after perfection does not allow him a moment's rest. The dynamic of mysticism consists in this incessant concentration of power for continual progression, and the effort to arrive at an ever greater deification produces drama in the soul. In fact, those who think to find only milk and honey in the writings of mystics, and hopefully seek in their words an all-accommodating optimism, are disappointed. The reader often experiences dismay or disillusionment in his study of mysticism; where he has hoped to find heavens of azure and rose he finds instead dramatic and tragic conflicts of the soul; instead of resting in cheerful flowery gardens he finds himself among barren rocky mountains. The mystical state is austere, and often hard and harsh. There are no doubt moments of sweetness, but even these are the result of vigorous action or of suffering endured. Catherine says very truly: 'Who loves much suffers much; as love increases, so does suffering'—a suffering that gives birth to happiness and joy. The synthesis of mysticism is composed of the thesis and antithesis: love and pain.

In his pursuit of the infinite the mystic annihilates himself to what seems an almost impossible extent, and as the infinite he pursues is an ideal that eternally recedes, the soul is granted neither absolute rest nor lasting peace. There are continual new births of spiritual longing, which keep the soul in continual movement, and produce at times an overflowing sense of satisfaction and joy, and at other times lesions of dramatic suddenness. These dramas are due to the infinite quality of divine love, whose inexhaustible wealth produces ever more abundance and whose

power inflicts suffering that is full of bliss. Ecstasy is not the achievement of a single state of mind, nor can it be concentrated in a single word; it is rather a complex of states of mind, some of which merge together, while others conflict with one another.

Giacomo Devoto has made a careful study of Catherine's ecstasies from her own references in her letters, and has tried, with much scholarly acumen, to isolate the specific phenomenon by analysing her linguistic expression—arriving at the conclusion that ecstasy 'centres in one essential word that holds in itself, alone, all the irradiating power of contemplative action. Around this word all her concrete affirmations are gathered in ordered subordinate ranks, insistent like echoes. The rhythm of her phrase adapts itself to this word, and becomes more and more excited till it reaches or barely touches the climax—then interrupts itself in a sudden awakening, or returns gradually to its normal tranquil pace.'

Linguistic study applied to ecstasy can give nothing more, but does not succeed in setting forth its real greatness. When carefully considered, ecstasy presents a complexity whose essence eludes a purely philological analysis. As Devoto characterises it, it is a supreme effort of the soul, which on reaching its highest point of tension, finds its true expression in one sovereign word. This description is not true of ecstasy alone, for it could be applied to all the affections when they are expressed with fervent emotion; in fact, in all the phrases that man utters or writes there is always a central, synthetic or dominating word—around which are grouped the concrete affirmations that pay it court. Ecstasy also may have this character, but this is not what constitutes an ecstasy. The mystic only shares in this common experience in so far as he seeks to express in language common to all what he has felt during ecstasy, and so, up to a certain point, the process of expression is the same for mystics as for non-mystics, where these are in a state of profound emotion. But in the phrases of mystics we find peculiar vibrations which impress on them a special and singular character. In these vibrations lies the secret power of mystical expression.

Giacomo Devoto, continuing with strict method his deductions, points out that one essential word characterises ecstatic expression, just as essential words are uttered also in love, and at

the approach of death; therefore there must be two ecstasies parallel to the religious ecstasy, and so, at least philologically speaking, the states of the mystic, the lover and the dying man may be considered as on the same plane. But this is to detract from the religious ecstasy. When we compare the power and the results of religious ecstasy with those of the other ecstasies asserted by Devoto, the differences are not only quantitative but substantial. Devoto himself, who in the development of his theory has felt some qualms about the parallelism he has suggested, affirms that 'here we are concerned always with ecstasy as *expressed* within the limits and laws of a concrete language', but as this method does not bring out the fullness and supremacy of the religious ecstasy we may conclude that linguistic studies are as insufficient to determine it as anatomical studies are insufficient to determine the life of living beings. So, if we wish to find the whole meaning of ecstasy, we must have recourse to other methods.

It is apparent that in ecstasy a vital current is produced that takes possession of the soul, empowers it, thrills and moves it; a current that does not flow into a single word, but endows entire phrases with equal fervour and power. It is uncircumscribable, indeterminable, and gives spiritual life to all who yield to it. Ecstasy produces states of mind both abysmal and celestial, inspiring timorous awe and all-conquering audacity; bliss is mingled with pain, wild joy with humble prostration. The most varied states follow one another, mingle, develop or overtake one another without a pause; in the midst of tumult comes serenity, and in a serene moment the outburst of the storm. There are no lines of demarcation—only loose, flowing, irregular contours, often concentric circles in continual expansion. No single point marks a pause, but there are various floating points of reference in the endless upward surge. The degrees of intensity reached are expressed in intense and manifold shades of colour, never to be described with a single word. Hence the mystics' use and abuse of contraries, with infinitely varied gradations: light-darkness, health-sickness, love-hate, weeping-laughter, perfection-baseness, Paradise-Hell, grace-damnation, pride-humility and other extremes that rule the mind like two fiery principles, impossible to define in one term.

It is true that the soul of the mystic tries to free itself from multiplicity to achieve unity, but it is an infinite and therefore continually creative unity. It is true also that at a given moment during the *asceti* the mystic utters a single essential word, the supreme achievement of his soul: God. But if materially God can be expressed in a single word, spiritually He holds concentrated in Himself a multiplicity of meanings: activity without rest, peerless light, ineffable might, and the idea of concrete worlds and an infinite number of other possible worlds. God means life, present, past and future; substantial unity implying innumerable diversities; the Trinity in operation; vision without end. In truth, God is the only word that can be called essential to the mystic, the only word that includes within itself alone all the irradiating power of contemplative action; when the mystic utters this word the whole world opens before the eye of his soul, and he feels as if he were soaring into a spiritual infinitude 'which words cannot describe'. God is a single word, but it contains in itself, and surpasses, all other words. In contact with the Triune God the creature feels one need only: to lose himself in the Divinity, to find himself again therein. 'A deep sea art Thou, Eternal Trinity! The more I search Thee the more I find, and the more I find Thee the more do I seek Thee. Infinite art Thou, for the soul that drinks of Thy waters is ever athirst, ever hungry for Thee, thirsting for Thee, O Eternal Trinity, ever longing to see Thee in the light, by Thy light.'

In ecstasy knowledge remains alert to observe the deification of the soul, and would wish this deification to increase for ever, knowing that it may never be complete. The spirit becomes almost disassociated from the flesh, and yearns for absolute freedom; nevertheless, the body still weighs upon it. 'O Eternal Trinity, fire and fountain of love, dissolve me this cloud of flesh!' To become pure spirit means uniting oneself with God. This union is truly an attachment—not the annulment of knowledge, nor the dissolving of the soul in God—because the creature, however lofty its flight, never exhausts the divine within himself, nor can become merged with it; hence the mystic's constant and insatiable longing, which produces mingled joy and pain. The soul continues to drink deep of the divine life at every moment, and this fills it with joy, but all the time it knows itself a poor

suppliant for grace. 'Thou, Eternal Trinity, art the Maker, and I am the work of Thy Hands.' Here we are at the impassable barrier, yet it is drawn so faintly as almost to disappear when a great wave of God's love breaks in overwhelming streams over the creature's head: 'Thou art in love with the beauty of Thy creature'.

The power of God's light now exalts and enraptures the soul; all becomes light to it, all is like a transparent sea: 'Thou lightest all'. 'Truly Thy light is a sea, because the soul is nourished in Thee. Thou art a peaceful sea, O Eternal Trinity! The water is not muddy, and therefore the soul has no fear, because it sees the truth; the water is clear, so that in it all hidden things are seen . . . it is a mirror wherein Thou, Eternal Trinity, grantest to me to know myself, for when I look into this mirror, holding it in the hand of love, it shows me myself in Thee, for I am Thy creature, and Thee in me, because of the union Thou madest of the Deity with our humanity.'

She is enraptured with wonder, and her being is poured forth in praise; all contrasts fade, antitheses vanish; only sweetness reigns, and the sweetness is God. 'O Trinity, Thou art all sweetness; there is no bitterness in Thee.' What can the soul do now but languish of love in the sea of sweetness, and, feeling its own life flow out into its Lover's being, become a part of love, and light within the Light?

All the soul's desire seems fulfilled. Yet the climax is still far away, and will ever be so. The light that seemed to have reached its greatest splendour grows in intensit, and irradiates new light in new heavens. The soul's gaze clings to it. Prayer becomes a thing of fire. Once more the soul gathers its strength; again it overcomes the self. It yearns to be filled with even greater outpourings of divine power. There seem to be no barriers left. The blissful soul soars aloft. But now, when it believes it has reached the Ineffable a shadow falls across it and it trembles. The barriers are still there across its path. Mortals are we, and after having tasted for a moment of the life of the immortals we must needs re-enter our mortal flesh. Cold and darkness return. The treasure we had found seems lost. A moment of discouragement, almost of bewilderment—then the soul takes courage and soars again. The body is still stiff; at the soul's touch it trembles, as if it



St Catherine. Codex Casanatense 292, Rome, XVth century

could no longer endure the bursting life of the spirit, but little by little the memory of what the soul has seen returns and is so vivid and full of joy that there breaks out a cry of faith: 'Robe me, robe me with Thyself, Eternal Trinity, that I may pass through this mortal life in true obedience, and in the light of the most holy faith, for my soul seems ever athirst for that light'.

Chapter XI

CATHERINE IN ROME

WITH THE completion of Catherine's book, her greatest spiritual work was now achieved; her mission on earth was nearly at an end. The return of Gregory XI to Rome had represented her maximum effort of co-operation in the important historical events of her time. In dictating the last words of her book, the invocation to the Trinity, she completed the legacy of her rich spiritual life, and established for all times her significance as a mystic. She was to live for about a year and a half longer, her activity was still to be assiduous and astounding, she was to write affecting wonderful letters, to urge the Pope, the Cardinals, prelates, and monks, friars and statesmen to defend the Church and purify it; but all this work, however admirable, was to show no markedly original character such as would increase her greatness in our eyes.

She still threw herself into the struggle and longed for the triumph of Urban's cause; but she was distressed at the realisation of her own powerlessness, and watched with a breaking heart the non-fulfilment of her desires. She had moments of joy, and after the battle of Marino it seemed for a fleeting moment as if her dreams were to be realised. Too soon the gloom returned and perturbing visions caused her great distress. She had always loved men, and still loved them; she wanted them to be good and happy, she believed in their salvation, but when she saw them at work she felt disillusionment and horror. Men find it easier to sink to the level of beasts than to rise God-ward. She knew this and grieved over it. During her trances and visions the earth seemed to be transformed into Paradise, and she saw the human and the divine merged in perfect harmony; but as soon as she looked around her she saw the Church contaminated by sin and

torn asunder by strife within. It was as if the earth were doomed to become the realm of disorder, with the spirit of evil triumphant over it.

Everyday life is far from ideal, and Catherine's senses told her this; but the ideal is greater than life, and therefore she would not renounce it. She preserved the purity of her ideal by immersing herself more and more in prayer. She loved men and believed in their salvation. If experience disillusioned her, no matter; she must rise above sordid reality; if the conduct of men often saddened her, the ideal still gleamed and sang in her soul. The wickedness of the world cannot be eliminated; but the ideal is a superior reality, a sublimated reality, as it were, and Catherine, the prophet of the ideal, soaring in spirit to the azure heavens, was trying to drag all humanity behind her. She did not succeed. But who ever did? Who ever will? Nevertheless it must be attempted, and with all one's might. In the measure of the effort made is seen the measure of the soul, and by this straining after the ideal there is established an indispensable continuity between the lower world and the higher. Catherine lived to spiritualise herself and all mankind; she wanted to raise to the ideal level that heavy and dull reality which is the sad heritage of the earth, and which sometimes caused her such agitation, fear and distress. Even when her body was tormented she felt her soul filled with surpassing sweetness, and becoming light and transparent like a divine spirit: *foris cruciatibus humanitatis, intus triumphis divinitatis*. So the earthly was merged with the heavenly and until shortly before her death Catherine always felt herself an integrating part of the humanity she loved and wished to save. When she realised how little she could do for men she invoked for them a baptism of Blood, the Blood of Christ that purifies all men and binds them together as brothers. Only a few moments before her death did she finally cease from every desire and invocation for men, and turn to God alone, with a long sigh of surrender and with unspeakable joy.

She arrived in Rome on November 28th, 1378. Twelve days previously Charles V, King of France, had declared for the anti-Pope, and eight days previously Giovanna, Queen of Naples, had officially taken the same step; the next day the Emperor Charles IV died in Prague, and in Rome Urban VI issued a new

Bull, condemning Clement and various schismatic Cardinals and prelates. Catherine arrived in the Eternal City accompanied by some of her fellow Tertiaries and many disciples. She was glad to be there. Her arrival in Rome was in fulfilment of her last desire, insistently expressed to the Pope in the letters she had written to him on September 18th and October 5th, from which we have already quoted. Hers was an official visit because this time she had insisted on Fra Raimondo's procuring from Urban VI a written command, so as not to scandalise the Tertiaries of Siena and those of her fellow citizens who accused her of being a 'gadabout'.

In Rome she immediately sought and obtained an interview with the Pope. Nothing is known of their conversation—Lando di Francesco, writing on November 30th, 1378, to the Lords Defenders of the People and City of Siena, informs us that 'Messer the Pope saw and heard her very willingly. What she asked of him we do not know, but we know that he was glad to see her.' Probably Urban VI was glad to find in her a staunch supporter of his legitimate claim.

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It was a very critical moment for the Pope. Rome was for the most part faithful to him, likewise Florence and Tuscany, with Perugia and other cities of central Italy; but the Queen of Naples and the King of France had abandoned him. Urban's chief problem at that moment must have been to think of some way to win back the confidence, loyalty and support of these two rulers. Possibly, while Catherine was speaking to him, he was planning to send her on a mission to Giovanna of Naples. He knew that the people of Naples were for him; in the summer of 1378 the populace had assaulted the Bishop of Mural, who had preached against Urban. But the popular rising had had no influence over the Queen's decisions, and therefore it was necessary to find some means of persuading her to abandon the schismatic cause. No one could do this better than Catherine, who had been in correspondence with Giovanna and was a most persuasive orator, who had shown exceptional activity in Florence in the Papal cause, and with her undoubted holiness would be of great help

to Domenico d'Afragola, the principal preacher in Neapolitan territory of the Crusade against the anti-Pope. Hence the Pope's plan to send Catherine to Naples, in the company of Catherine of Sweden, also famous for her own sanctity and as the daughter of the saintly Brigid. This plan was communicated to Fra Raimondo da Capua, who informed the two Catherines. Both Catherine of Sweden and Fra Raimondo were averse to the project, the former most decidedly, the latter more timidly. When Fra Raimondo explained to Urban the uselessness and dangerous nature of this mission the Pope understood and gave up the idea. This renunciation was a disappointment to Catherine of Siena, who had for long cherished a hope of going to Naples to speak with Queen Giovanna, and who was always ready to undertake for Christ's sake difficult missions involving the risk of death and requiring boundless faith for their accomplishment. She thought it was cowardly to give up this plan and protested with some violence—an attitude which her confessor and friend admired, although he carefully forebore to bring the plan up again for further discussion.

At that time the Pope and Fra Raimondo were beginning to be seriously perturbed by the trend of events in France, and especially by the attitude assumed in favour of Clement VII by the King, Charles V. No precise or official news had yet been received in Rome, but it was known that the King had received the two Papal Ambassadors, Niccola di San Saturnino, a Dominican and Master of the Sacred Palaces, and Arnaldo, Bishop of Famagusta. He had received them on the 11th or 12th of September in Paris, in the Palais de la Cité, and allowed them to plead the cause of the Schismatics before six Archbishops, thirty bishops, many Abbots, Prelates and Doctors of Law and Theology. This was clearly a grave matter for the Roman Papacy and on the 21st of November Ambassadors were sent to the King of France to try to avert the danger that the King might help the Schismatics or become one himself.

It is not our task here to outline the history of the relations between France and the Schismatics. It has been presented with a wealth of documents, a lively historical sense, clarity, fairness and breadth of view by Noël Valois. Some details of Fra Raimondo's mission have been set in a new light, and very astutely,

by Père Laurent. What matters for our story is to understand how events in France were judged in Rome at the time of Catherine's arrival there.

Urban VI had no political intuition and knew little or nothing of men. If he had been a shrewder observer he would have realised that the agreement reached between the Limousin and French Cardinals was sure to result in intense propaganda for their cause in France and he would necessarily have adopted some useful counter-measures. Perhaps Urban counted on the loyalty of the French people and the various Universities of France—but this was a misplaced trust, because although popular opinion was at first in Urban's favour it could easily be deflected, by a shrewd king, towards a belief in the legitimacy of Clement VII, and this in fact came to pass. It is true that already in June, two Ambassadors from Urban, Cicco Tortello and Pietro di Murles, had gone to Charles V to inform him of the validity of the election of Bartolomeo Prignano, and it is also true that in Paris on the 16th of June 1378 they had defended his legitimacy publicly in the King's presence; but, unknown to the Pope, Pietro di Murles was a secret agent of the schismatic Cardinals, and in a private audience with Charles V he had denied what he had asserted in public.

When he had sent new ambassadors to Charles V, the Pope turned his attention to French affairs, perhaps because the struggle he was engaged in, first with the Cardinals and then against the anti-Pope, absorbed nearly the whole of his activity.

Modern historians are inclined to think that Urban's diplomacy, as shown in his dealings with France and the King of France, was short-sighted and weak, because he had no well-thought-out plans to put at once into action. Pastor attributes to him the vast design of wishing to free the Papacy from French influence, but here the great historian is surely prejudiced by his own wish, and has ignored the message Urban VI sent to Charles V: 'Although I am an Italian, yet I have always been, and I am now, by choice, a Frenchman. I want to satisfy the King in all matters concerning him, his honour and his advantage, more than any preceding Popes, though Frenchman themselves, have done. I will do much more, with great generosity and without seeking a reward.'

In politics Urban had no genius for taking the initiative, and preferred to counter-attack rather than to attack. The few

successes he enjoyed during his Papacy were due not to his own carefully constructed plans but to the conditions which regulated the balance of power in Europe, and which various sovereigns were concerned with. He acted energetically in certain cases, but without being able to secure any advantages for the Papacy or for Italy. He succeeded in overcoming some of his most powerful and dangerous enemies, but in such a way that the leaders responsible for these successes soon became even more dangerous enemies of his. Having no breadth of political vision, events often took him by surprise and dictated his course of action. Although he was courageous in adversity he had no skill in bending the will of others to his own. He could mould neither States nor events nor men; and his desire for world domination led him in the end to a dreary solitude.

He must have felt indignant surprise when he heard that the representatives of the Cardinals had been ceremoniously received by the King. He immediately nominated two Ambassadors to go to Charles V bearing such instructions as might serve to dissuade him from schism. This time his Ambassadors were well chosen for their loyalty to him: Giacomo Ceva, Marshal of the Curia, and Fra Raimondo da Capua. When Catherine arrived in Rome the mission of her confessor and friend had already been decided upon; nevertheless Fra Raimondo was perplexed. He was always ready to do his duty when his life was not thereby imperilled, but he had a presentiment this time that his new task might be a very dangerous one. Certainly he would have preferred to remain simply the chief preacher of the Crusade against the Schismatics; he had been given this position on the 8th of November of that year. But he could hardly refuse this new honour, however dangerous. Urban, as Pope and as his friend, counted on him; moreover, it was a grave crisis for the Church; the political power of the Papacy was at stake; he could hardly refuse a mission that might prove to be of the greatest service to the Church. He knew that, come what might, he must strive to do his duty and set out for France, but he could not shake off a lively fear of the Corsair galleys, in the pay of the Schismatics, who were lying in wait at the mouth of the Tiber and along the Tyrrhenian coast. He had to go by sea, because on land all the passes and roads were carefully guarded by hostile militia, and it

would have been folly to try to slip through. Before departing he wished to speak with his friend Catherine who, with her wonderful insight, might foretell the course of events.

As soon as he had a chance to speak to her at some length he eagerly opened his heart to her, certain that she would counsel him according to God's will, but with a faint unconfessed hope that she might disapprove of his departure. Instead, although she grieved to lose her friend again so soon, she rejoiced to hear of Fra Raimondo's new mission, and not only persuaded him to obey the Pope but, affirming that Urban VI was the legitimate Pope, added: 'I want you to set yourself to preach and defend this truth, for it is your duty to do this for the truth of the Christian faith'.

It was a command that could not be questioned: a command that thrilled and fortified Fra Raimondo's soul; but it must be admitted that, in spite of this encouragement, he still felt some qualms of fear; in his heart he would have preferred to hear Catherine tell him to stay peacefully in Rome, as we see clearly from his account many years later, when the worthy Dominican still remembered the sadness that had fallen upon his soul: 'I did as she said, and bent my neck to the yoke of obedience'.

Perhaps it was with the intention to help her friend, inexperienced as an Ambassador, that Catherine gave him a letter for Charles V. About two years before she had written to the King at the Duke of Anjou's request, to beg him to desist from waging war against the English, so as to be free to lead a great Crusade against the infidels. Probably Catherine did not know that her letter had never reached him, and thought he still must remember her. In any case, she considered it was her duty now to defend the Church, and so it was necessary in these circumstances to warn the King of the French not to fall into the snares of self-love and of those incarnate devils, Clement VII and all the schismatic Cardinals. So she wrote to him, urging him to reject 'the advice of those who live in darkness' and not to give credence to the false accounts in circulation about the election of Urban VI. If, she said, after having read this letter, he still remained sincerely in doubt and did not wish to compromise himself by giving due obedience to Urban, he should at least remain neutral: 'If you do not want to do good, at least do not do evil'. And why had he not

appealed to God's faithful servants, who alone could enlighten him, to learn how the Conclave had been conducted? In writing this she probably thought of her own saintly friends, who might have given him good information and advice; it may be that she would willingly have gone herself to speak with the King, to convince him of Urban's legitimacy. In any case, for the moment, he could ask for information from the University of Paris: 'You have the fountain of knowledge there close to you', she wrote. Had she known that, while she was writing, most of the Doctors of that University had already decided for the Schismatics, she would probably have indignantly referred to that famous seat of learning as a 'fountain of all iniquity'.

There is very little in this letter that the Clementines could not easily have refuted. It is full of intense religious feeling, but, politically speaking, the arguments brought forward are weak. It is not one of Catherine's best effusions. It contains repetitions of thought already, and perhaps better, expressed in preceding letters. She makes no careful study of the events that have occurred, or of the causes underlying these events, and she reports as certain truth the most unreliable rumours that were then current in Rome. In fact Catherine knows very little about what has happened, and although she writes with great sincerity and a certain vigour of style her arguments seem very ineffective. One wonders, also, why she did not write to the Duke, Louis of Anjou, who had shown such a liking for her in Avignon.

Meanwhile, Fra Raimondo had to set out on his mission. Catherine accompanied him as far as his port of embarkation. She was anxious to be near him, for she had some doubts about the energy and courage of her beloved master and disciple. When he went on board the galley at Ostia, and she saw the mooring ropes cast off, she gazed at him with eyes full of tears. As the ship began to sail away she knelt on the quay and made the sign of the Cross with her upraised hand, in the direction towards which the ship was moving, thus invoking for him God's help in his struggle against the elements and the perverse will of men.

It is natural for the Christian to desire the Church to be guided by saintly counsels, as it is also natural, in times of corrupt morality, to wish to replace a sinful clergy with priests who lead blameless lives. These were Catherine's desires. During her

stay in Rome her chief aim was the reform of the Church. She saw it corrupt and disunited, but she believed that its wounds could be healed and its unity restored. She was sure God would give His aid in the work of reformation, and therefore it was necessary for His servants to labour with the utmost zeal and trust in Him. While she visited the Churches of Rome her soul was thrilled by continual reminders of the blood of the martyrs, and she was sure that that blood would still have the power to heal the Church. The Pope agreed with her that a radical reform was needed—in fact, this was the point on which they found themselves most closely in agreement, and it was this consideration that enabled her to pass lightly over his grave defects of character, so that although she knew his violent and autocratic nature had alienated even his own collaborators, yet she loved him tenderly. He had understood the importance of her own plan—to form a Papal Council of saints, mystics and ascetics, and from this beginning to set out to reform the Church.

In the letter she sent to Fra Raimondo at Pisa, soon after his departure from Rome, written to encourage him to persevere in his mission to France, we find a succinct reflection of Catherine's thoughts on Church reform: 'We see this Bride all dismembered. But I hope that in His supreme and eternal goodness God will make her members whole once more, of sweet odour and not putrid, and that these members will be re-fashioned on the bowed shoulders of God's faithful servants, lovers of truth, by their many labours, sweats and tears, and humble and continual prayers. And in our labours we shall find refreshment, rejoicing in the reformation of this sweet Bride.'

According to Catherine only the Saints, the ascetics and the mystics could thoroughly reform the Church. It never occurred to her that these men, humble, pure, and powerful in the realm of the spirit, might prove to be mediocre or incapable administrators of earthly affairs. She did not distinguish between the religious and the political Church, because she judged politics solely as an expression of faith, and would willingly have renounced all temporal power if she had thought it was in any way harmful to the power of the spirit. As there had to be a Papal State she thought of it as a vast religious community, in which human passions should have no power to hurt, and all men

should love each other like brothers, with their thoughts fixed on God. It seems hardly credible that she thought such a State could be set up on earth, within a given period of time. She may not have hoped for its establishment during her life, but she certainly thought it would come about through the rule of the servants of God. If the Church had holy men to guide it she believed it would become holy—and from this to the setting up of the Kingdom of God on earth was but a short step.

With this idea clear in her mind, she insisted that Urban should surround himself with pious and devout men, and more particularly with those hermits, monks and friars whom she herself knew and whose holiness she revered. During December 1378 she often saw the Pope: 'Catherine of Monna Lapa is here, and the Holy Father has spoken to her many times, and sent for her many times', the Sieneſe Ambassador, Lando di Francesco, wrote on December 27th, 1378, and added that she obtained from the Pope whatever she desired. Urban, who was after all very pious, came under Catherine's spell, and, at least for a short time, seems to have shared her belief that the schism could be overcome by spiritual weapons alone, and therefore at this time he willingly listened to her and granted her requests. Her logic in speech or writing, considered from a strictly Christian standpoint, seemed to him invincible. So he approved of her plan of gathering her friends together in Rome to form a Papal Council, that was to eliminate schism and restore unity, purity and strength to the Church, and on December 13th he drew up a Bull to be sent to all the people she indicated. This Bull very evidently reflects Catherine's own thought, and some of its passages, stripped of their ceremony, might have been dictated by her: 'We believe and hope that in the present terrible storm that threatens to wreck the Church, more help will be gained, for God's cause, through the prayers and tears of the righteous, than through the weapons of war, and human prudence'. With this note of confidence he appealed to all righteous members of the Church to weep and pray without ceasing, to obtain by this means the intervention of God to save the Papacy from ruin.

Fawtier is surprised that Urban VI did not entrust to Catherine herself the task of gathering together in Rome the devout friends on whose assistance she relied, but instead gave this charge to

Fra Bartolomeo Serafini, the Prior of the Carthusian Monastery of the little island of Gorgona. Possibly the Pope's motive in doing this was the desire to avoid involving Catherine too much in Church affairs, because some members of the Curia and some ecclesiastics might have been scandalised to learn that a woman, even if she were a much admired Saint, was the promoter, and, in a certain sense, the head of a Council whose function was to exercise a reforming influence on the Pope and his Church. 'Our sweet Holy Father, Pope Urban VI, the true supreme Pontiff, wishes to apply a remedy necessary for the reformation of Holy Church; that is, he wishes to see the servants of God by his side, so that their counsels may be a guide to himself and to Holy Church'. But it may be that Catherine herself did not want to be made prominent, and so advised Urban to turn to her friend, Fra Bartolomeo Serafini, reserving to herself, in a purely private capacity, the task of gathering up her friends.

We do not know what part the Carthusian Prior of Gorgona played in this attempt to form and direct the new Papal Council, but we have four letters written by Catherine, in which she exhorts and encourages her friends to obey the Pope's invitation, and to set out without delay for Rome, where an extraordinary mission awaited them, that of guiding both Pope and Church. The plenary meeting was to have been held on January 17th, 1379. The first to be invited were: Fra Bartolomeo Serafini of Ravenna, Fra Giovanni Upezzinghi of Calcinaia, the Prior of the Carthusian Monastery of Pisa; the Vallombrosan Giovanni of the Cells; the Augustinian William of Fleete; the Dominican Taddeo of Orvieto; the Franciscan Leonardo of Montepulciano; Fra Luca of the Florentine Umiliati, and Pietro of San Casciano. We do not know to which Order this last-named belonged.

These were the names immediately suggested to the Pope by Catherine, and those which came first to her mind; but other names also were suggested, and sent to the Prior of Gorgona, so that he might get into touch with all these devout men. Among others, we learn from Catherine's letters, were the Augustinian Antonio of Nice, the Spoletan hermits Andrea da Lucca, Fra Baldo and Fra Lando, and also Fra Paolino of Nola. Not a numerous group, to be sure, for such a capital undertaking, but it was Catherine's belief that even a few people could reform the

world, provided they were rooted in holiness and ready to give their lives for the cause. These were therefore the friends on whose devotion she relied.

Certainly, when we consider these Papal Counsellors today, even from the religious point of view they seem to us, with one or two exceptions, of mediocre character, similar to dozens of others we could pick out in any age and any place; but Catherine was not looking far afield; she preferred to choose men who were spiritually akin to her, who breathed the same warm religious atmosphere. It seemed to her futile to go out of her own circle to look for future reformers worthy of her esteem; and therefore she turned only to those she knew, telling them their hour had come; they must hasten to answer God's call: 'Let the servants of God come forth, let them come forth to announce the truth and sustain it, for now their hour has come'.

With this ringing certainty in her words she roused the lukewarm, encouraged the faithful, and exhorted all the Caterinati to fight for Urban VI and to hasten the end of the Schism. Not the slightest ripple of doubt shook her confidence in the immediate success of her plan; she was certain that the future was in her hands, and in those of her Saints. The reform of the Church, for so many years desired and prayed for, was about to take place. She rejoiced; at long last the Church would become truly Christian.

Meanwhile the news she received was anything but consoling. Fra Raimondo da Capua, after having eluded the danger of the Corsair ships in the pay of Clement VII between Rome and Pisa, and later between Pisa and Genoa, had set out from Genoa to Ventimiglia, where he had learnt that the roads and passes of France were guarded by the Schismatics' militias under the leadership of the Count of G  nevois. Terrified, the worthy Dominican was tempted to turn back on his tracks. He tells us himself that a confr  re of his, of those parts, sent him a letter of warning telling him not to continue his journey, because his enemies were determined to kill him. Perhaps this was an exaggeration on the part of one Friar or the other, because in all probability the Schismatics merely sought to take him prisoner, as they had done with his more courageous fellow Nuncio, Giacomo Ceva, who had continued his journey. Fra Raimondo

was too easygoing by nature to venture himself in hazardous undertakings; he did not want to be hindered, or, worse still, molested; he loved and admired Catherine, but had never succeeded in imitating her scorn of this life of the body; so, at Ventimiglia, as soon as he realised he was in serious danger, he turned back to Genoa.

Catherine was displeased as soon as she heard of this. She had hoped that Fra Raimondo would overcome his timid nature; perhaps she had illuded herself that she had, by her own example and words, infused into him energy, faith and courage; but now she had to acknowledge that when the choice came her beloved master and disciple thought only of himself and of his own safety. She was distressed, even a little annoyed; her thoughts of him were tinged with sadness; yet she never ceased to be compassionate and motherly with Fra Raimondo; she wrote him a letter in which she developed, enriched and adapted to her own purpose the words of St Paul to the Corinthians, or those similar words he addressed to the Hebrews, where he affirms that he who is fed on milk is a child ignorant of what he does, while men of mature age and wisdom feed on solid food. For Catherine, Fra Raimondo is at this moment a suckling child, for he wishes to make the best of both spiritual and temporal worlds without running any risk; unfit for battle, he does not understand the grandeur of those souls who, for a just cause, fling themselves fearlessly into the fight. For her the joys of prayer and meditation acquire a greater value if they are preserved, or gathered, during action; to be content with contemplation alone is to be content with an incomplete or maimed spiritual life. In her own case action did not diminish contemplation but followed after it, and therefore was contained in it. The brave fighting man has passed out of his childhood and bears in his own body the wounds of Christ. Catherine knows this from experience; her vivid and powerful contemplation, experienced in ecstasy and trance, had never suffered any diminution when she had hurled herself, body and soul, into the fight to defend Christ and the Church. In raising oneself to the third Heaven one must never lose touch with the earth; it is instead the third Heaven that must come down to flood the soul of the seeker after righteousness. In action, the delights of contemplation become more precious, and

serenity more radiant. Those who fight always enjoy calm weather even in a stormy sea; in bitterness they taste great sweetness; with humble little means they acquire measureless wealth; while scorned and torn asunder by the world they gather themselves more perfectly into union with God. 'While suffering hunger, nakedness, false accusations, violence and insults, they feed themselves more perfectly on immortal food.' But her beloved Father and disciple had not been able to join such proven warriors: 'You were not yet considered worthy to be on the field of battle; but, like a child, you were thrust behind; and you fled willingly, and were delighted with what God had conceded to you on account of your weakness'.

This was a grave reproach for Fra Raimondo, but Catherine did not want to humiliate him too much, and so, half-jestingly, half-affectionately, she called him 'my naughty little Father', almost as if she were caressing him to make him smile. She loved him and understood and excused his weakness; yet she wanted him to be more courageous in the future: 'How blissful would have been your soul and mine if with your blood you had cemented a stone in the wall of Holy Church, for the love of the Precious Blood!'

On reading these words Fra Raimondo must have shuddered, but he may also have reflected that this was too lofty a vision for common man. Catherine was athirst for martyrdom, but she could hardly expect her Caterinati to show the same enthusiasm. He was ready to work assiduously for the good of the Church, but not beyond the limits of human possibility; he was no hero to court death voluntarily and deliberately for the sake of the cause he was defending.

Catherine, however, did not want her master to feel too much ashamed of having been afraid: 'Really we have cause for tears when we see that our scanty virtue has not deserved such a reward'. In this use of 'we' and 'our' we see the delicacy of her feelings. She has been harsh—now she tries to soften the effect. She feels herself responsible for Fra Raimondo's weakness. If she had prayed and insisted more earnestly, her master would certainly have had more courage. Therefore he must not be cast down; he must banish shame, raise his head, and be ready to acquire new energy to be able to do later on what now seemed

impossible. He must enter the heart of his divine Master, drown himself in the Blood of Christ, inebriate himself with the Blood; then he would become valiant and daring in the battle and rejoice. Like a priestess invoking power from Heaven she demands for Fra Raimondo Blood, and more Blood and still more of the saving Blood of Christ, which would enable him one day to plunge into the battle 'like a manly knight, for the honour of God, the welfare of Holy Church and the salvation of souls'.

Other sorrows fell upon Catherine during these days. While she was endeavouring to gather around herself and around the Pope ascetics and contemplatives, who were to purify the Church, she heard rumours which threw doubts upon the future results of her labours. People were asking what such a Commission of pious men could hope to achieve in a moment of such crisis for Christianity. When Catherine heard of these doubts and questionings, she was annoyed and grieved. What valid reasons could be cited to justify the scorn thrown upon her plan, and what proof had these murmurers that the work she had undertaken with such enthusiasm would be in vain? Had God not granted her the certainty that with the help of the Holy Spirit she would be able to achieve great results in Church reform? Why should she doubt? 'I confess that Thou hast promised soon to fulfil my desires. . . . I thank Thee, O lofty and eternal Trinity, because Thou hast promised soon to strengthen Thy Bride.' It was impossible to doubt these divine promises. Therefore it was the sceptics who were deceiving themselves and others; she was sure she was acting according to God's commandments. So she declared, with sudden imperiousness: 'And I, presumptuously, say that this shall be done!' Determined as she is to overcome the scepticism of her critics, nevertheless the doubt shown by some of God's servants about the value of the Papal Council she had planned creeps even into her own mind, subtle as a breath of wind. It shall be done, even if not all at once. It shall be done, even if only in part. And then she thinks: it shall be done, even if no concrete results are obtained, because the impress of our desire and determination cannot be cancelled, and will be sufficient. She reflects further, and her confidence in the outcome of her effort decreases. Is success really necessary? It may be that the plan will fail; nevertheless her conscience will be at rest, and this is what matters most.

Her confidence, that had seemed at first unassailable, has been shaken; the impulsive strength that had set out to overthrow all barriers has been checked. She begins to admit the possibility of failure. This decline of confidence shows how prudently and dispassionately she examined her own work, without hiding from herself the probability of a negative result. In her own words: 'And if we do not now achieve our principal aim, at least the way will have been opened. And even if nothing comes of it, we shall have shown in the sight of God and of His creatures that we have done all we could, and our conscience will be relieved. So in any case it is well.'

A still greater disappointment awaited her later on when some of the ascetic hermits declined the Pope's invitation to come to his aid. She could not understand this. For her there was a time to speak alone with God and a time to go out among men bearing a flaming torch to light their path. Woods and wildernesses are delightful, but if the pleasure they give us becomes a constant necessity of our life they are doing us harm by making us selfish. Christ is prodigal of His love towards His faithful, but on condition that they are manly, spend themselves in the service of others, and know how to fight when need arises. They must know how to oppose not only the invisible powers of darkness, but the enemies of the Church too. When God's honour is at stake His servants must come out of their forests and form a compact band, in battle array. The woods, full of perfume and song, and the sunlit solitudes must be left behind, and the solitaries must experience at close quarters the shock of human passions, so as to realise to the full the violence of self-love and the tragic drama that torments Christian folk. They must hasten to where the Church and the Pope are most endangered, ready with militant speech and strengthening counsel, throwing in all the forces of the spirit to avert the fall of Christendom.

Alas! Catherine is obliged to witness grievous defections in her Family; she sees her friends the hermits, like Fr William of Fleete and Fra Antonio of Nice, 'deceived by consolations and hopes, treated as if they were revelations', and suffers very much. Why do they turn a deaf ear to the Pope's appeal which it is clearly their duty to answer? The Bachelor replies saying that 'he who is bound by divine obedience need not obey the commands of

creatures', but surely that is not obedience to creatures when one obeys a call to compose the Schism that is tearing Christendom asunder? They must be frank with themselves and acknowledge their laziness and selfishness. They would like to have order, peace and serenity everywhere without stirring a foot to help to bring about this happy state of things; but it is not in this way that mankind can be won for Christ. Happily there are some servants of God, friends of hers, Fra Andrea of Lucca and Fra Paolino of Nola, who, although weary with age and infirmities, have given up the delightful life of the forest and the austere joys of their hermitage to come to Rome. Theirs is an example to imitate. Catherine believes in the power of example and hopes that the sorrow her friends have caused her may bear a future gain. Her wrath is soon appeased: Father William has shown irreverence in ignoring Urban's honourable invitation; nevertheless he is a great servant of God and must be considered with humility and affection. If the Bachelor has grieved her, the fault may even be her own, for in her 'ignorance and faultiness' she has not known how to exhort him to become a warrior in his neighbour's cause. Moreover, in the lives of contemplatives there are at times mysterious actions that grieve those who observe them, but the fault may lie with the observers who fail to understand the profound and hidden motives for these actions, which, on further reflection, may prove to be according to God's will. So Catherine suspends her judgment, which might have led her to accuse them, and refrains from the slightest condemnation of her friends.



The Council of ascetics and mystics desired by Catherine was a very real and vivid conception of her soul. She thought of it as an indispensable means of renewing the life of the Church, and for its formation and success she would willingly have given her life.

Urban VI thought of it very differently. He was anxious to establish the strictest morality among his clergy, and believed the help of these saintly men would be useful for that purpose; so when Catherine proposed to him her plan of reform with the help of these ascetics he approved of it and at once did what he

could, by means of his Bull, to support her plan. He did not however attribute to it the decisive importance that it had in Catherine's eyes; to him it was a mere detail in the vast field of Papal policy. He may have thought that much more than a Council of monks was needed to raise the prestige of the Church and overthrow the power of Clement VII, supported as he was by soldiers, bishops, Cardinals, Princes and Kings. Urban needed money to pay for militias and to arm them, so that he could answer force with force. In those days he was not even sure of his own headquarters; he had had to give up residence in the Vatican because from Castel Sant'Angelo the Clementines were bombarding the whole Borgo. Meanwhile some important European States had not yet pronounced on his legitimacy; others declared themselves neutral, others again opposed him. He could hardly be expected, in these circumstances, to trust solely to the prayers of the devout. He was not a Saint, and was not slow to call in the aid of armed men, that he considered more effective than spiritual forces.

The last months of 1378 and the first weeks of 1379 were full of uncertainty, suspicion and anxiety for the Church. The Pope and the anti-Pope were continually seeking and preparing new moves and counter-moves, initiating local offensives, and thrusting at each other's weakest points with accusations and condemnations. There was for both sides a succession of alternating disappointments and hopes. Urban was appealing for allies and supporters, and thought Catherine would be useful to him. His first consideration was to make sure of the loyalty of central Italy; Catherine, who had already been of great service to the Holy See, could and should be of use now in the Papal cause. Rome, Tuscany and Umbria, united together, might exercise a very great influence over the rest of Italy. Urban became a paladin of the cause of Italian unity, and pointed out the harm that the schismatic Cardinals, most of them French, had done to his country. He declared himself anti-French. It is to be noted, however, that he displayed very different sentiments about France and the French when he wrote letters to the Court of Charles V or gave instructions to his Ambassadors at that Court. In this moment, however, the Italians were all irritated by the wrongs they had endured at the hands of the French prelates, and so they were glad to hear assertions that appealed to their national pride. Urban

tried to turn this situation to his own advantage. If the Papacy could succeed, he thought, in securing the allegiance of the whole of Italy, it would then be easy enough to cast doubts on the election and achievements of Clement VII, and little by little, all Europe would come to acknowledge Bartolomeo Prignano as the true Vicar of Christ. The schismatic Cardinals and the anti-Pope had been, it was true, more swift to defend their cause at the various European courts, and they had with great skill convinced Charles V of the validity of the election of Fondi, thus gaining a great advantage over him; but if he, the true Pope, could win the adherence of the whole of Italy, he could then direct a careful and well-planned propaganda in his own favour and induce Charles V and his followers to reconsider the course of events, review their own attitudes, and, as a necessary consequence, abandon the anti-Pope and attach themselves to him. So the unity of the Church, the desire of the whole Catholic world, would be achieved.

It was therefore essential to have the whole of Italy recognising him as legitimate Pope, so as to be able to secure for himself a safe centre for the irradiation of his authority in Europe. That is why Urban VI was in these days so concerned about the schismatic Queen, Giovanna of Naples, about Otto of Brunswick, Giovanna's fourth husband and the administrator of Monferrat, about Amedeo VI of Savoy, who had declared for the anti-Pope, about the Count of Fondi and Francesco da Vico, and Giordano Orsini. These were enemies to be feared; they had many supporters, they were combative and could count on the service of famous militias, eager and ready to fight. Urban's most urgent need was to find soldiers to support his cause, so as to set army against army.

Meanwhile, the use of spiritual and diplomatic weapons was certainly not to be neglected; in fact, Urban excommunicated the anti-Pope and the schismatic Cardinals, statesmen and prelates; he proclaimed a Crusade against the Schism, charging certain valiant Religious to preach it in Italy and beyond her borders; he sent the pamphlet '*De Fletu Ecclesiae*', composed by the jurist Giovanni di Legnano in support of his legitimacy, to various European courts and the most famous centres of study; he nominated Ambassadors to defend his cause; he made use of Catherine's labours; he honoured Philippe d'Alençon, the ex-

Archbishop of Rouen who was now a Cardinal, with such ceremonious pomp that 'if he had been a Pope he could not have been treated with more honour', as Cristoforo da Piacenza observes. This was to ingratiate himself with the French clergy, in spite of Charles V, to whose family the Cardinal belonged.

Above all, Urban was now aiming at gathering together an army, in which he placed more confidence, for the victory of his cause, than in the prayers of holy men and women. During the first months of 1379 he begged for money from those states of Central Italy that had remained on his side, and availed himself of Catherine's epistolary eloquence for this purpose.

He also succeeded in winning over to his cause the Company of San Giorgio, with Alberigo da Barbiano as its leader, and this at a time when Clement VII was also doing his best to take the Company into his pay. This was the most successful move Urban had yet made.

Meanwhile, the Clementines had maintained the initiative in warlike operations. In Rome, Urban was obliged to live in Santa Maria in Trastevere, because the French captains Pierre Gandelin and Pierre Rostaing, the defenders of Castel Sant' Angelo, were reducing the Borgo to ruins. Viterbo was an excellent centre for the mercenary troops who raided the surrounding countryside and even pressed up to the gates of Rome. From Marino Giordano Orsini and his men controlled the territory of the Alban mountains. Pietro Bernaldez, a Catalan pirate in Clement's pay, guarded the mouth of the Tiber and the Roman shores; further south, at Traetto, Capua and Naples were the mercenary companies of Brittany, Gascony and the Langue d'Oc. In Northern Italy the armies of Otto of Brunswick and Count Verde were ready to come down as far as Naples to support the Clementines. There were other important centres for the Schismatics in other cities of Italy, and many more abroad.

Until this moment all had gone in the anti-Pope's favour; the Schism was spreading, and some States, uncertain which way victory would turn, remained on friendly terms with both Pope and anti-Pope, as did Gian Galeazzo Visconti, or else declared themselves neutral. However, towards the second half of January 1379 fortune turned against Clement VII. He fell ill of tertian fever. The castle of Cesena (a name of ill augury: did Clement

remember the massacre of the citizens of Cesena ordered by him about two years previously, which had made his name execrable to all Italians?) was sold to the Urbanites by the Clementine Captain whose duty it was to defend it. Francesco Marescotti, formerly Archbishop of Pisa and now Cardinal Bishop of Preneste, a friend of Catherine's and appointed Legate of Campania, reduced most of his territory to obedience to Urban, and was the first Urbanite to win a victory over the French militias.

His success, although of modest proportions, seemed to turn the tide in favour of Urban's troops. Meanwhile, Castel Sant' Angelo was surrounded by his mercenaries. The Captains of the Castle asked the schismatic Cardinals to send men and provisions—they were running short of both—and at the beginning of February the Schismatics ordered their generalissimo, Count Louis de Montjoie, to go to their aid. The concentration of troops took place at Latingeto, about ten miles from Fondi. Meanwhile, Onorato Caetani, the Count of Fondi, ordered Nicola da Ceccano to occupy Carpineto, a large town in the Lepini hills which, if it were to fall into Urbanite hands, would prevent any freedom of manoeuvre on the part of the Count's own troops. Nicola da Ceccano occupied the town with three hundred horse and a large band of infantry, but failed to get possession of the citadel. When he heard of this the Cardinal Legate, Francesco Marescotti, sent Caetano Caetani, Onorato's brother and a loyal Urbanite, with the militias stationed in the neighbourhood, to the help of the defenders of the fortress. Arriving by night and with the help of a full moon—a brilliant moon, writes Cristoforo da Piacenza—the Legate's militias entered the castle, joined the defenders and fell upon the Gascons who were occupying the town. There was 'a most fierce battle', which ended in victory for the Urbanites; of the troops of Onorato Caetani and the Gascon Company more than a hundred dead were left on the field, and 120 horses and 140 foot soldiers were taken prisoner. The rest sought safety in flight.

The news of this defeat was a great blow to Clement VII, who was ill and incapable of leading in person the campaign against Urban. It was certainly exaggerated at the time by popular rumour, and although it was a serious setback for the Clementines, it did not lead directly to the defeats they were to suffer later on, nor was it in itself such a grave defeat as to cover the

Clementine troops with ignominy. Certainly, however, the war-like fame of the Gascons had suffered, and the Urbanites gained self-confidence, while the feeling of the population of Central Italy became more hostile to the French Cardinals and their Italian supporters.

The condition of the garrison of Castel Sant' Angelo was also becoming critical. The Count de Montjoie did not come to the defenders' aid, nor did he make a decisive attack on the Papal troops. After establishing his headquarters at Marino, he raided the countryside around, without achieving any positive results beyond exasperating the peasants and wasting precious time. Meanwhile in Rome there was increased activity in the Urbanite cause. Cardinal Giovanni Fieschi arrived in the city with a great following, ready to fight the Schismatics. The Ambassadors of the King of Aragon, and the Flemish Ambassadors, had important colloquies with the Pope; the Ambassadors of the King of Hungary were planning with Urban to undermine the power of the Queen of Naples. The Curia was already speaking of Clement VII as sick of the dropsy, incapable of further activity; and it was said that the schismatic Cardinals repented their rebellion and would willingly have submitted to Urban if they had not been so much in the power of the Queen of Naples.

There was some truth in the rumour about Clement's illness: he was gravely ill. The tertian fever obliged him to change his residence; he went from Fondi to Sperlonga, fifteen kilometres away as the crow flies. Some of the Cardinals preceded him there; Clement himself arrived on March 30th, having travelled with a certain pomp and distributed largesse (to the sum of twenty-four florins) to those who had gathered to see him pass.

In the months of February and March the political activity of the anti-Pope was left to the King of France, ably seconded by the diplomatic skill of Louis, Duke of Anjou, but, on the whole, it met with ill success. Clement must have had the impression that things were not going well for him in Italy. He had reason to fear that the Company of San Giorgio, with its Captain Alberigo da Barbiano, would soon pass into Urban's pay; he saw that the military operations, conducted by his skilful Captains, were disconnected and inconclusive; he fully realised the aversion the Italian people felt for him and for the schismatic Cardinals, and

he knew the keen desire of these latter to abandon Italy again for Avignon. These indications, and others unknown to us, sufficed to show Clement that he would never succeed in imposing his authority in Italy and that, if he stayed there, he would find himself in difficulties. In fact, we learn from Noël Valois of the precautionary measures taken by the anti-Pope and his Cardinals for their personal safety while they were staying at the Castle of Sperlonga: 'From twelve to fifteen sentinels mounted guard at night on the castle walls; all doors that were not strictly necessary, and any windows through which an enemy might creep, were closed or walled up. Three cannons with their munitions arrived from Gaeta on April 18th. Timber was cut in the woods around the castle to construct a palisade; the intention was to complete with scaffolding an unfinished stone tower, and to build projecting platforms for defence above the "curtain" between the bulwarks.' There was a continual coming and going of couriers between Sperlonga and Fondi, Sperlonga and Marino—an interchange of messages, orders, news, warnings and advice. Evidently there was some uncertainty in the Clementine camp, and the little band at Sperlonga felt anxious.

It was at this juncture that Clement VII violated the intangibility of the temporal power of the Church in Italy by conferring upon the Duke of Anjou the kingdom of Adria, formed of Papal territories. The Bull sent to the Duke on April 17th, 1379, by the anti-Pope, granting him this kingdom, proves that Clement already considered his position in Italy to be hopeless, and was therefore willing to spoil the Church of important possessions in order to transfer them to anyone who could command an army powerful enough to establish him as Pope in Rome.

But still more powerful blows were inflicted on Clement towards the end of April. The Captains of Castel Sant'Angelo had for many months maintained an admirable resistance, surrounded as they were on all sides with moats, dykes and trenches, machines of war and watchful guards, so that 'a bird could hardly have got out'. The scanty stores of food, diminishing every day, made a continuation of the defence impossible. No reply came to the besieged garrison's appeal for help. The exhausted defenders had been willing to surrender since February, but on honourable terms; the Romans, however, insisted they would treat with the

French only '*cum laqueo ad collum*'. Therefore the defence continued as bravely as its diminishing resources would permit. Non-combatants were sent out of the Castle, to economise the food supplies; munitions were sparingly used. Meanwhile the besieged appealed to the Clementine army for reinforcements. No help came from Marino. At last Captain Bernard de la Salle succeeded in entering Rome by night with a large band of mounted soldiers, hoping to be able to join the garrison of Castel Sant' Angelo, but the Canons of San Giovanni in Laterano perceived his presence and at once gave the alarm. Immediately the Roman militias took up arms and Cardinal Giovanni Fieschi, at the head of a troop of horse, attacked the anti-Papal band, put them to flight, and pursued them as far as Marino.

This was the second defeat for the Breton and Gascon Companies; their reputation was rapidly declining. The Papal troops were overjoyed and began to feel confident of victory. New militias were formed to fight the anti-Pope's French troops, and Companies, like that of Apulia, were enrolled to attack the Count of Fondi. A warlike enthusiasm took hold of the citizens and country folk of Central Italy. Towards the middle of March the Curia heard with great relief that the Company of San Giorgio, then at Perugia, would soon proceed south to fight on Urban's side.

From abroad too the news was now more encouraging. The German Diet and the new Emperor, Wenceslas, acknowledged Urban VI as true Pope and declared themselves ready to defend him. The King of England, Richard II, sent word that, as far as he was concerned, Urban was the true Pope and any Clementine Ambassador who dared come to his country to assert the contrary would be speedily arrested.

Such a change of fortune in their favour inflated the pride of the Romans and Urbanites, who began to be bold and arrogant towards the Clementines. The Castle of Sant' Angelo was still resisting the attacks of the Roman troops towards the end of April. The resistance had cost and was still costing unheard-of sacrifices; the defenders were reduced to four ounces of bread a day and cooked herbs and roots. The miserable ration of bread was almost exhausted, the wounded were increasing in number, and the breaches opened by the enemy in the castle walls were a

source of grave anxiety for the garrison. What were they to do? For two months already they had been trying to negotiate an honourable surrender with Giovanni Cenci, the commander of the besieging troops, but meanwhile the fight dragged on. On April 27th it was realised that further resistance was impossible; the garrison saw it could hold out no longer, and surrendered. This was a grave defeat for the French, and the third in less than three months. The Clementines began to lose heart, while the Urbanites became bolder. On April 16th Clement had tried again to buy back into his service the Company of San Giorgio: in vain, the Italian mercenaries were for Urban. The only course of action now left to the Breton and Gascon troops was to attack and overcome Alberigo da Barbiano, but the Clementine troops had lost the initiative in the war and preferred to remain on the defensive.

The generalissimo of the Clementines, Louis de Montjoie, had perhaps hoped to subdue Rome by starvation, and was therefore guarding all roads and communications, and raiding the surrounding countryside. These frequent looting expeditions and devastations merely served to content his soldiery, but could not be a serious preparation for war. He had no single and considered plan of battle. When he heard that the Company of San Giorgio had left Ponte Lucano, to the south of Tivoli, to march towards Marino, and observed that it had divided itself into three bands to prepare for battle, he also did this, and taking command of one band himself, he entrusted another to Sylvestre Budes, and the third to Bernard de la Salle. Montjoie had twice as many men as Alberigo, and his were hardened troops proved in battle. Perhaps he was confident of crushing the eighty lancers, of whom each enemy squadron was composed, with his own six hundred lancers; perhaps he underestimated the warlike capacity of the new Italian Company. As soon as he saw that the enemy was about to launch an attack, he himself attacked with great fury and fell upon the squadron commanded by Galeazzo Pepoli. This squadron, assailed with such violence, fell back and was thrown into confusion. Alberigo at once saw its danger and immediately, with great daring, hurled his own squadron, followed by his other troops, into the gap. The onrush of the French was checked and the retreating troops took heart once more. The soldiers of both

sides plunged into the mêlée as if drunk with slaughter, and the battle flared up in a general fury.

Alberigo soon emerged as victor. Inspired by his example the Company showed powerful strength and performed miracles of daring and courage. They were determined to win at all costs. The Gascons and Bretons began very slowly to yield ground, then gave way, and finally fled. The Company of San Giorgio remained victorious in the field.

As soon as Alberigo da Barbiano wrote to the Pope about this victory, and the news spread in Rome, there were great rejoicings in the Curia and among the Urbanites. Foreign countries, far and near, were informed of the event, so that the Pope's victory might everywhere be celebrated. It was a victory that had a moral significance quite out of proportion to its modest dimensions, and it became a sort of rallying point of national pride. Was there an awakening of Italian consciousness in Central Italy? Urban VI hastened to declare that Italy had been freed of the barbarians. He may have had joyful hopes of a final liquidation of the anti-Papal movement, and have thought that after such a crushing defeat of the French troops it would no longer be possible for Clement to bolster up his prestige again: then everyone, at home and abroad, would be forced to recognise Urban as the true Vicar of Christ.

In fact, the Clementine army was virtually demolished: three hundred dead, Louis de Montjoie, Sylvestre Budes and Bernard de la Salle all taken prisoner, and with them fifty corporals and two hundred and fifty other men-at-arms. The victor took a booty of five hundred horses. The hundreds of Bretons and Gascons who fled in disorder were scattered and panic-stricken, and could represent no further threat, even if they joined forces with a hundred Italian lancers and the militias of the Caetani and the Orsini, still faithful to the anti-Pope.

Clement VII understood in that moment that he had lost Rome. It would have been foolish to hazard another military adventure, or even to prepare for dogged resistance at Sperlonga. Prudence demanded he should go to a safer place, and he decided to withdraw to Naples, where he would be under the protection of Queen Giovanna.

On the morning of May 9th he took ship in the port of

Gaeta with three Cardinals, and set sail for Naples where he arrived the next day, about mid-day. He was honourably and ceremoniously received; the Queen welcomed him at the gate of the Castle dell' Ovo, where a great gala banquet had been prepared for him.

The anti-Pope hoped to be able to rest in Naples, and to plan, with the Queen and her Government, his next moves in Italy; but hardly had he arrived when the people rioted to protest against his presence. For some months past Urban VI had been busy with propaganda among the Neapolitans, and had succeeded so well that as soon as Clement arrived in Naples the population showed their hatred of him. The riot was a serious demonstration against Clement and also against the Queen for supporting him. The people attacked the palace of the French Archbishop, and the monastery of San Pietro ad Aram, which had a schismatic Cardinal for abbot; then, still shouting and cursing, they ran to the Castle dell' Ovo, crying: 'Death to Clement and his Cardinals! Death to the anti-Christ! Death to the Queen, also, if she defends him!' and to emphasise still more clearly their loyalty to the Roman Pope they added: 'Long Live Pope Urban!' The popular rising was too violent and extensive to be quelled with force, and the populace gave no signs of returning to calm, but continued to demonstrate against the anti-Pope and the Queen. Clement soon began to fear for his own safety and that of his followers. 'All Italy, land and sea, was for Urban, who had succeeded in unifying it around himself.' While this thought saddened Clement, he was tormented by the fear that Urban was plotting to seize him, alive or dead. At that moment he could think of nothing better to do than to take ship once more, with the three Cardinals who accompanied him, and return to the Castle of Sperlonga. So, on May 13th, a sorrowful and frightened man, he set out once more by sea.

The next day, at Sperlonga, he must have reflected very seriously about his own situation, and that of his schismatic Papacy that he was resolved to save. The forces still at his disposal were very scanty; the help that he might expect from the King of France, from Louis of Anjou, Amedeo of Savoy and the other powerful schismatic leaders, would take long to come; at this moment he was without supporters in central and southern Italy and might

easily be taken prisoner. He paid a brief visit to Fondi, to ascertain more facts, and returned to Sperlonga convinced that no plan for war, or for resistance, could possibly succeed in Italy. He decided therefore to set out for Avignon with the few faithful who had remained with him. Meanwhile he may have received the news that Queen Giovanna, unable to quell the revolt of her people, had on May 18th proclaimed the legitimacy of Urban VI and was sending Ambassadors to Rome to offer the Pope her full and complete submission. In any case, he saw that the dangers that beset him increased with every day and that his residence at Sperlonga might have a disastrous end. On May 22nd, with all his court, except for two Cardinals, Clement VII left Italy and set sail for Marseilles. It was a long, dangerous, even at times a terrifying, voyage. Finally, on June 20th, he reached Avignon.

When Urban VI heard that his enemy had set sail for France he felt joy mingled with chagrin; joy because his redoubtable foe would no longer molest him at close quarters, chagrin because he would have felt safer if he had been able to capture him. Perhaps he now hoped that the union of the Italian States around his person would soon produce the union of Catholic Europe and the end of the Schism. But if he hoped for this he was deceived, for it was after the arrival of Clement in Avignon that the Schism settled down, became ordered, defined and consolidated, and crushed the Church for forty years, inflicting wounds that tore Christendom asunder and disturbed men's minds so powerfully that it prepared the way for the future Reformation.

The vicissitudes of Papal fortune that we have been describing were known to Catherine, almost, one might say, experienced by her. Very often the disciples, friends and admirers who went to stay with her for an hour, or for some days, as if her house were a charitable hospice, brought her information about the Schism; the Curia gave her semi-official news, and she heard the popular rumours about the events and people most talked about. Hearing and observing all, she was still convinced that political events must in the end become religious events; her general and fundamental outlook on the Schism was the same as that of the Pope and the Curia. She trembled with fear or indignation when she heard what Clement VII and his supporters were doing, and hurled crushing invective against the Schismatics. She saw herself as the

paladin of the Papacy, and wrote to everyone affirming that Urban VI was the true Pope and the schismatic Cardinals incarnate fiends.

When examined dispassionately, her arguments, common to all good Urbanites of the time, have no great value either historically or dialectically, but she animated them with such profound conviction that she imparted her fervour to others. The historical facts interested her only to a certain extent, and were never the main source of her contention; it was the moral and religious significance of events that was all-important to her.

Towards the end of 1378 she wrote to Queen Giovanna of Naples, when it was known that the Queen had become a Schismatic. Her letter tries to be historical and objective, but instead is polemical and accusing. She relates the history of the Conclave that had elected Urban, without conceding to the Cardinals any attenuating circumstances; she ignores the threats of the Roman populace, and deduces Urban's legitimacy from the austerity of his life. If Giovanna wishes to understand the difference between Urban VI and the Schismatics she must consider the conduct of Clement VII, of the Cardinals who have elected him, and of their followers, and then think of what Bartolomeo Prignano's life has always been. There is no righteousness in those men. Is there a Saint or a just man among them? She must remember that where there is no virtue there is no truth; therefore 'their lives show they do not speak the truth'. And who can believe men who are strangers to truth? Or, worse still, accept them as leaders of a religion that is founded on virtue? Who is the anti-Pope if not 'a man of iniquity, a devil, and therefore acting like a devil'? And, being a devil, what confidence can he inspire? Had the Schismatics no better candidate to elect? Their spiritual and moral poverty is complete, else 'why did they not elect a just man?' Here is the clue to the illegitimacy of Clement VII. It is useless to find out whether or not the election took place according to the rules; useless to refer to canon law for enlightenment; the proof that Robert of Geneva is not the true Pope lies in the fact that we know him to be unjust, for justice can never be in accordance with injustice. Whether or not the Cardinal of Geneva possesses political gifts is beside the question. If a Pope is not virtuous, every other quality of his, however precious, becomes

injurious and therefore wicked: the Vicar of Christ must be a model of virtue. On this point—and here lies the profound meaning of letter 317, from which we have quoted—all Christians must agree with Catherine.

Why then has Queen Giovanna become a Schismatic? Through the counsels of the King of France and her own ministers? For political reasons? All this has certainly had its part in forming her decision, but according to Catherine it was due, more than anything else, to her sensual nature, because 'unsteady and passionate as you are, you have let yourself be ruled by passion. O wretched passion! Through this I see you changed, and reduced to the condition of a fickle woman without constancy.' This also is a purely moral judgment, and the Saint goes on to predict the inevitable judgment of God that she sees already suspended above the Queen's head. As she loves the Queen and wishes to save her soul, she begs her to abandon political schemes, ambitions and associations, and turn all her strength to the subduing of her own passions. She must reform her life, return to truth; only by so doing will she free herself from evil and, drawing near to the fountain of purity, lead a prosperous and happy life. If, instead, Giovanna prefers to live in falsehood, then the wrath of God will fall upon her: 'If you do not change your ways and correct your life, cleansing it from all error . . . the Supreme Judge who allows no fault to pass unpunished, unless the soul purges itself with heartfelt contrition, confession and penance, will give you such a punishment that you will be set as a terrifying example to warn any who should ever wish to rebel against Holy Church'.

She turns this threat at once into a prayer: 'Return to your fold, be ruled by your shepherd lest the infernal wolf devour you'. The past is written in everlasting characters, and time is a terrible witness unless we repent of the evil we have done; but if we are contrite God wipes out the past, and then only the present and the future acquire meaning and life. Therefore Catherine's request becomes insistent and imploring: 'There is still time, dearest mother, to appease the judgment of God. Return to the obedience of Holy Church, recognise the evil you have done, bow down beneath God's powerful hand, and He, who regards the humility of His handmaid, will be merciful to you; He will soften the wrath He feels for your sins.' Liberation will therefore come from God,

and what joy it will be to breathe again great draughts of purity and feel the soul, free from all sin, become lighter and ever lighter. Purity is given through the Blood of Christ, for His Blood works miracles: 'Through Christ's Blood you will graft yourself on Him and bind yourself to Him with the bond of charity, in which charity you will recognise and love the truth; the truth will raise you out of falsehood, you will dissipate all darkness, you will have vision and knowledge of the mercy of God. In this truth you will be fed, but in no other way.'

This epistle is so full of urgent and indignant appeal as to seem the bearer of an imperious divine command. Another letter sent to Giovanna (letter 348 of Tommaseo's edition) is more tranquil and affectionate. It was probably written before the battle of Marino. Reading it immediately after letter 217 the style seems faded. There are spurts of indignation which is at once smothered in pity, and the latent violence is lulled to wistfulness. As Giovanna is persisting in schism, to the ruin of her soul, she must be begged and implored to withdraw from error: 'Do not make my eyes weep rivers of tears over your poor little soul, or over your body; for I consider your soul as if it were my own. . . . When I consider your soul I see that it is dead, because it is separated from your body; it is persecuting not Pope Urban VI, but our truth and faith.' Catherine writes very sadly. She had placed great hopes in Giovanna of Naples as leader of a Crusade against the infidels. But the Queen had accepted schism and persisted in it. Catherine's heart was sore. She would have wished to be near her, speak to her, engulf her in a flood of loving kindness, enlighten her soul, save her from schism. 'O how blissful my soul would be if I could come down there to you, and offer my life to give you all the blessings of Heaven and earth, to take away from you the knife of cruelty with which you have killed yourself, and to help you to use the knife of compassion which kills vice; that is, that with the holy fear of God and the love of truth you may robe and bind yourself in His sweet will!' The dark threats of the preceding letter have now given place to phrases of more general application: 'We must fear God and tremble beneath the rod of His justice'. And although she wishes to frighten the Queen, she does not now predict disasters for her in life and after death as a direct chastisement from God, but sets before her the

threat of being declared a heretic by the Pope, and so losing her kingdom. Now, however, this grave threat, instead of being severely presented, is explained and almost mitigated: 'And if I consider your condition as regards these temporal and transitory goods that pass away like the wind, you yourself have already forfeited them; it only remains now for you to receive the final sentence of confiscation and to be publicly declared a heretic'. We do not know for certain whether Catherine was here quoting the Pope's intention concerning the kingdom of Naples. Baluzio refers to various witnesses who reported that since the end of 1378, Urban VI had been planning to give the throne of Naples to Carlo of Durazzo, and to force Giovanna to retire to a nunnery; this was a very likely plan for Urban to think of, and it is also quite possible that Catherine was repeating his wishes in her letter, or echoing the rumours current in the Curia about the necessity of dethroning the schismatic Queen.

In any case Catherine's intention was kind; she wanted to warn the Queen of a grave danger, and to save her from ruin and shame: 'My heart breaks and cannot break, for the fear I have that the devil may so darken the eyes of your intellect that you will suffer grave disaster and shame and confusion. I would gladly suffer even more—to save you.'

Catherine wrote not only to the Queen of Naples, to try to induce her to repent and return to the obedience of the Pope of Rome; but she wrote also to a Neapolitan gentlewoman, an intimate of Giovanna's, so that she also might sow the good seed of truth in the Queen's heart.

During these four months preceding the battle of Marino, Catherine was employing all her energies in religious activity and in propaganda for Urban's cause. She had frequent interviews with the Pope, and was a trusted and authoritative interpreter of his will. When she heard that the Ambassadors of the anti-Pope had visited Siena to persuade the city to take the part of Clement VII, she immediately set her disciples to work with her own enthusiastic energy in support of Urban. Pagliaresi wrote at once to Cristoforo Guidini and to Stefano Maconi to ask them to inform him which citizens of Siena sided with the anti-Pope, and which could be considered loyal to Urban. The Pope needed this information. Catherine herself, in her spiritual letters to friends

and disciples, often referred, sometimes merely *en passant*, to Urban's legitimacy and to the urgent needs of the Church—so as to make sure that the group of her Caterinati and friends were reminded of the justice of the Pope's cause, and so that his supporters might continually increase. When she heard that Urban needed money to continue the war against the Schismatics she at once despatched to the Signoria of Florence a fiery sermon on ingratitude. She had known them at first hand, these Florentine Signori; they were selfish and avaricious, and she told them so: 'Your subjects are not fed at the Commune's breast with justice or brotherly charity; everyone (in power) pursues his own particular ends with deceit and lies, and no one cares for the common good. Everyone seeks power for himself, not the welfare and good government of the city.' These are truths hurled in the faces of the Signori who, like all politicians of every age and place, think more of satisfying their own ambitions and their thirst for wealth or power, than of the needs of those they rule. However, these observations and reflections of Catherine's do not end, as one might logically expect, in a warm appeal for the better treatment of the Florentine people, but take a winding road and arrive at the conclusion that our chief neighbour is the Pope, and therefore we owe to him supreme gratitude, and the Signori of Florence have the duty to come to his aid. Had the Florentines not received great benefits from Pope Urban a few short months previously, when they made peace with him? Had the Pope not mercifully re-admitted them to the fold of Holy Church? They must remember, then, the graces they had received, and support Urban and his cause with generous disbursements of money.

This just and vibrant letter, when considered in detail, is certainly ill-constructed. Catherine would have written more effectively if, in the first few lines, she had simply appealed to the Signori of Florence to help the Pope because he was in need, according to their bounden duty as citizens and as Christians. But very often the direct purpose for which she wrote her letters got overlaid with general and religious reflections, which were, after all, those nearest to her heart; the original intention reappeared on the surface, here and there, but the link that bound it with her other thoughts was so subtle as to make it appear almost extraneous. This is a further proof that political propaganda was never

felt as a natural need of Catherine's soul, and that when she made use of it, it was in the cause of religion. Those letters of hers that are mainly political in content are very few, because she nearly always smothered politics in an exuberance of religious matter. This does not mean that she had no use for ecclesiastical politics; in fact, she accepted them as a necessary complement to the life of the Church. Her way of thinking is the consequence of her passionate apostleship, which induced her to believe every victory won for the Papacy was a victory won for Christ in the consciences of men.

Simpler, more direct, and therefore more powerful are the letters she sent to the rulers of Perugia, and, some months later, to the rulers of Siena. In these she boldly presents the problem of Urban's need of support from his faithful, and declares it is the duty of these governments, who have received benefits from him, to give him every help they can. The supreme Pontiff needs money; they must send him their offerings at once if they wish to show they understand what gratitude is, not only the gratitude of individuals, but the gratitude of States.

While she wrote these encouraging and comforting letters to distant friends and disciples she continued to direct the spiritual children she had with her in Rome, and helped and guided those Religious who had accepted her invitation to come to Rome, who were to direct their efforts towards making the Church one and holy. She procured Indulgences for all her friends, to enable them better to defend Urban's cause, a cause she considered to be as worthy as a Crusade. She had not given up the idea of a Crusade against the infidels, of which she had dreamt for so many years and which she was determined to set in action; this campaign against Schism was a secondary Crusade, and prayer alone would secure its triumph. She wrote to Monna Agnese da Toscanella: 'Concerning what you sent word to me about, of going to the Holy Sepulchre, I do not think the time is right for it now; I think it more according to the sweet will of God that you should stay here, and cry out continually with heartfelt grief before His countenance, with great sorrow to see Him so wretchedly reviled, and especially by that heresy that has been started by wicked men to corrupt our faith, saying that Pope Urban VI is not the true Pope'.

The real, the great Crusade against the infidels is not then to beset aside for any other; it is only postponed till a better time. It could not be abandoned, for it had a universal significance, as an attempt to convert the whole world. So Catherine continued to think of it as a future event, and wrote to Don Pietro of Milan who had expressed his desire to take part in the Holy Expedition, advising him to hold himself in readiness because she intends, as soon as the opportunity presents itself, to ask the Pope to proclaim the Crusade: 'Again I reply to you and promise you that when the time comes, so long desired by you and other servants of God, and when it is possible for me to ask for permission from the Vicar of Christ, I will do so willingly, so that your holy desire may be fulfilled'.

The thought of the Crusade never left her. On May 30th, when the Urbanite cause seemed about to triumph—the anti-Pope had set sail for France—Catherine was thinking about it with great longing and, desiring to hear it at last proclaimed, she wrote to Urban: 'These servants of God will be the soldiers who will give you total victory, not just victory over wicked Christians, who are members cut off from holy obedience, but over the infidels—for I have a great desire to see the standard of the Holy Cross raised above their heads. And now it seems as if they come to invite us. It will then be doubly joyful to go.'

The familiarity that Catherine had acquired with the Pope and his court did not blind her to the defects of either. Faced with a danger so grave as Schism, she understood that it was useless to remain fixed in an uncompromising attitude towards moral and religious questions, observing a strictness which, if absolute, would also be barren of good results; nor was it a moment to inveigh too much against those who, in the Church, failed to practise an integral Christianity. In the sad times through which they were passing it was necessary to be comprehensive and generous: 'You cannot all at once wipe out those human faults that are commonly committed within the Christian community and chiefly among the clergy', she wrote to Urban. Nevertheless, it was her mission to insist that at least the Cardinals should be irreproachable. Otherwise, what advantage would the Church have gained when, on September 18th of the previous year, it had reconstituted the College of Cardinals? If the new Cardinals were to follow in the footsteps of the old, what would the Church gain?

'I tell you that the divine Goodness complains that His Bride has been divested of her old trees (the schismatic Cardinals), who had grown old in vices, in pride, filth, avarice and the practice of simony; and now the new trees (Urban's Cardinals), who should confound those vices with their virtues, begin to stray and to follow the same pattern.' But the responsibility for this is to be attributed partly to the Pope himself: 'Your Holiness has not that concern for this matter that you should have', observes Catherine, and, becoming bolder, she advises Urban to discipline his own impulsive and choleric nature: 'For the love of Christ Crucified, mitigate a little those impulsive outbursts of your own nature. Chastise your nature by means of holy virtue.' With supernatural strength he is to discipline his natural temperament and so become a worthy Vicar of Christ. Has she not prayed to Christ, saying: 'I desire that Thou shouldst make of Thy Vicar another Christ'?

Urban VI, besides indulging to excess his own autocratic temper, was ever ready to grant unjust privileges to his relations; Catherine knew this and rebuked him for it—a rebuke without harshness, veiled with much praise that she really thought he deserved. 'You have by nature a great heart', she told him; 'you are zealous for the good of the Church, you have the character of a reformer, but that is not enough. You need to acquire supernatural virtue because he who trusts to nature only, when the time comes that he must punish people who are very near to him, withholds his hand and is afraid to strike.' Without appearing to do so, she has aimed well and struck her target.

But Catherine's ideas on how to set about ecclesiastical reforms gave her no peace, and made her insist to Urban: 'Surround yourself with virtuous men, those I have indicated to you; give them the chief offices in the Church; let them advise and guide you. My devout friends are among God's familiars, and will never let themselves be corrupted, neither by flattery nor by wealth. They have been admitted to the divine mysteries, and judge human events with detachment and clarity; they grieve over the filth that has made the Church putrid, and pray without ceasing that she may soon be cleansed. Trust yourself to them, and God's honour and your own will shine again, and the Schism will come to an end because heresy is extinguished in the good and holy fame and odour of virtue.'

It was then the moral and spiritual life of the Church that most interested Catherine, while she learnt with some trepidation of the warlike events that were taking place in Rome and the surrounding country during those weeks. She longed for the triumph of the Urbanite cause. We do not know whether she realised the significance of the skirmish at Carpineto, but she certainly rejoiced at the fall of Castel Sant'Angelo and the victory of Marino. 'Four weeks ago', she wrote to Urban on May 30th, 1379, 'we have seen in a most memorable way how the power of God has worked wonders by means of His vile creature, so that we clearly see that it is He who works, and not human power. Let us then give the glory to Him and be humbly grateful.'

The emphasis laid on the 'vile creature' (herself) through whose means God had worked His miracles, has led some writers to deduce that she played some part in the conclusion of negotiations for the surrender of Castel Sant'Angelo; but surely Catherine's assertion is of too generic a nature to permit such a precise explanation. The 'wonderful works' may include the fall of Castel Sant'Angelo, but also the victory of Marino and Clement VII's flight from Italy. It is natural to suppose that the Saint, in her anxious thoughts and prayers, followed the vicissitudes of the struggle, and that she may even have advised Giovanni Cenci, whom she held dear, to be generous in his dealings with the French, but this does not mean (as even Tommaseo thought) that she had a hand in the negotiations themselves. We have no reason to think these were difficult, long or complicated. The defenders of the Castle were short of food and could no longer continue the resistance, and the soldiers of the anti-Pope found themselves unable to succour them. Surrender became an absolute necessity, so that in the end no protracted discussion was needed between besiegers and besieged. It may therefore be asked why Catherine attributes to herself such a large share in the major events of those days, and why she insists to Urban on the part she has played. She does this to make it quite clear what power there is in the prayers of God's friends. For her all historical events take place either in the devil's domain or in Christ's; as the Clementines belong to the devil they must be utterly defeated, and who can do this but Christ Himself? But how can He intervene unless He be implored to do so by folk who are dear to Him? That is why Catherine

pours out her tears and prayers before Christ, and strives to raise to His throne her longings and her impulses of love. She has not the slightest doubt that God grants her prayers; in fact, what she prays for comes to pass.

She has prayed for the fall of Castel Sant'Angelo, and it has surrendered. She has prayed for victory for the Urbanites and, sure enough, Alberigo da Barbiano has defeated the schismatic troops. She has wanted the anti-Pope to be humiliated and defeated, and now she hears of Clement VII, beaten, fleeing from Italy. All this is a sure sign of the divine answer to the prayers of God's servants; she knows God fulfils her desires. Therefore, without the slightest fear of complacency, she asserts that 'the power of God has performed wonders through His vile creature'.

The battle of Marino moved her profoundly and stirred her imagination; in the mercenaries of the Company of San Giorgio she saw not professional soldiers, ready to fight for whoever paid best, but idealists, ready to venture their lives in a sublime cause. 'You are knights who have entered the fight to give your lives for the love of life and your blood for love of the Blood of Christ Crucified', she wrote to Alberigo da Barbiano and his corporals, on May 6th, 1379. But her imagination soared yet higher, and she thought of the adventurers as martyrs: 'Now is the time of the new martyrs. You are the first to give your blood. What is your reward? An infinite reward: life eternal.' The end achieved makes her forget, at least momentarily, the ugly means that had been used to reach it.

Urban's cause is the Church's, and therefore Christ's most holy cause: 'In serving the Church and the Vicar of Christ you serve Him'. The valiant warriors who have fallen in battle defending Urban VI may have been venal, violent and rapacious, but dying for Christ they are purified by His Blood, and so must be numbered among the 'new martyrs'. Yet her enthusiasm wanes as soon as she detaches her thoughts from the results of the battle of Marino, and from those who died or were wounded on the field, to meditate on the Company of San Giorgio as it really is. She has heard rumours that some of the Company, bribed by offers of higher pay, have passed into the service of Clement VII. She grieves over this and hopes none of the others will follow their wretched example; otherwise the Pope will soon be without

defenders, and the ruin of the Church will be at hand. In her letter to Alberigo, which Professor Gardner calls a prose poem in honour of Christian chivalry, she mingles appeal with advice, exhortation with rebuke, and prayer with thought. 'Your soldiers', she tells him, 'rob and devastate. This is not their task; they should stick to fighting, for the understanding and the body cannot attend to two things at the same time, pillaging and fighting.' The Saint conceives of fighting as a sacred function, and of the soldier as the strict defender of justice and truth. As, however, the leaders and men of the Company do not share her ideas about this, Catherine insists that the Captain, Alberigo, shall inform his men about their great mission, and oblige them to purify themselves, that is, to go to confession. Deprecating the desertion of some of the Company to the Schismatics, she warns him: 'Be always on your guard against treachery, within or without'. In fact, to avoid possible treachery she advises Alberigo to choose for his officers 'manly and faithful men, the most righteous you can find', and above all begs him to offer himself to 'sweet Mother Mary', taking her as his advocate and defender. By acting thus he will make sure of having a perfect army, that will be ever victorious, winning for itself extraordinary fame on this earth, Christ's garden. She admires him now but will admire him much more in the future, if he remains loyal to Urban VI. Moreover, she is ready to pray for him, as Moses prayed for his people while they fought and won through his prayers. The same day on which she wrote to Alberigo Catherine wrote also to the 'Lords Banderesi and Four Good Men, Governors of the Republic of Rome'. Her soul was overflowing with joy for the fall of Castel Sant'Angelo, and for the Company's victory at Marino—but in the midst of her joy and gratitude she was perturbed by the conduct of the Romans. Which of them had acknowledged Giovanni Cenci's merits, his fortitude, loyalty and frankness? Who had rendered thanks to God for the victory of Marino? Who was caring for the Company's wounded? Who appreciated the example Urban had set in going bare-footed in procession from Santa Maria in Trastevere to the tomb of the Apostles? The Romans showed the victors nothing but ingratitude, lukewarmness of feeling, uncharitableness, carelessness and envy. Observing this, Catherine feels impelled to write to the Banderesi, to show

them very clearly the disillusionment they have caused her. It is a letter that ought to have shaken the consciences of the rulers, a closely reasoned and fervent sermon on the evils of ingratitude; one feels the writer's clear conviction that politicians and soldiers can be reasoned with as well as men of the Church. She does not perceive that the Romans judge events from a point of view opposite to her own. For Catherine the fall of the Castello and the victory of Marino mean a long step towards the unity of the Church and the conquest of the world for Christ, so that she thought of Cenci and the Company of San Giorgio as instruments of Christ working for the establishment of His kingdom on earth. Therefore they were worthy of admiration and gratitude. For the Romans, instead, both victories were important because they gave a greater security to Rome and a little more tranquillity to the surrounding countryside; but they were not considered as initiating a general period of welfare or future bliss. Giovanni Cenci had certainly directed with valour the siege of Castel Sant' Angelo up to the moment of its surrender, but the courage and skill of all those who had fought had been no less than his. Why should he be exalted as if he had greater merits than all the other leaders? Some prominent men in Rome extolled his courage, others belittled it. Envy or malice may have prompted these rumours which were frequent in the City. As for the Company, what had it done, after all, beyond what it was paid to do? Why should the Romans be grateful to these mercenaries? If the Roman people neglected to care for the Company's wounded it was because of the general dislike for mercenary soldiers, who in fact habitually tyrannised over the States they were serving and supposedly defending; they often raided and pillaged the whole territory. Why should the people be kind and considerate to them? There was, moreover, another reason for the antipathy felt in Rome for Alberigo's soldiers. The city was short of corn, and the responsibility for this scarcity was readily laid to their door.

This way of judging events was far removed from Catherine's conception, for she detached herself from all selfish considerations to imagine and to will a perfect way of life for the Church and for all Christendom. She wanted the Papacy to triumph, and therefore she insisted that the Banderesi should be charitable,

peaceable, and grateful to the victors of Marino, who had not yet completed their task, for they had other battles to fight in Urban's cause, and other victories to win before they could bring about the desired result: one Shepherd of one Church.

The victory of Marino spurred on Urban, now confident of success, to attempt by diplomatic means to turn France away from her flirtation with the anti-Pope, and to make Charles V recognise him as the legitimate Pope. France could not be ignored, for she was the most important Catholic state of that time, and her religious policy was imitated by several lesser States. Urban therefore decided to nominate an Ambassador to send to Charles V, and on Catherine's advice he chose Raimondo da Capua, who had remained at Geneva after the failure of his earlier mission. At once he sent him Bulls and instructions, and to spare him the dangers and obstacles that had previously prevented him from completing his journey he now informed him of a safer route through territories governed by the Kings of Aragon and England, both officially loyal to Urban.

As soon as he arrived at the French court Fra Raimondo was to plead Urban's cause with arguments based on the instructions he had received, somewhat ingenuous and, in certain details, mistaken instructions. Urban VI and the Curia had not been informed about the success the astute schismatic Cardinals had enjoyed at the French Court, nor had they understood the character of Charles V. Fra Raimondo's instructions were not based on powerful or original arguments, but merely repeated the already threadbare Urbanite themes in an effort to prove the legitimacy of Urban VI, a legitimacy which was said to be demonstrated by the fact that universities, Princes, Kings and the Emperor himself had adhered to his cause. Urban was described as 'very French' by choice, although Italian by birth; the French were reminded of all the benefits that had been granted to them to please their King, and they were promised further help and advantages in the future and reminded of the sudden and significant death of the schismatic Cardinal of Thérrouane, Aycelin de Montaigu; the surrender of Castel Sant'Angelo and the victory of Marino were given a superhuman character as if God had willed them to exalt Urban and show he was the true Vicar of Christ.

These somewhat feeble arguments were rendered even less

efficacious by the addition of some palpable falsehoods due to wrong information. How could Fra Raimondo have asserted at the French Court, without making a fool of himself, that a disfiguring mark or 'tau' had appeared on the face of Clement VII, soon after his election as anti-Pope, as a token of divine punishment? How could he have declared to the French that the Universities of Orleans, Toulouse and Paris had taken Urban's part, without calling forth categorical denials or half-pitying smiles? What proofs had he to show that neutral Spain was Urbanite? If Fra Raimondo had arrived at the French Court and followed his instructions, not only would he have failed to convince Charles and his Court, but he would have done harm to Urban's cause. Urban, however, had not the slightest doubt about the arguments he thought were in his favour, and was already congratulating himself on excellent results from the French mission.

The month of May seemed full of good augury for the Papacy. The consequences of military success were such as to fill the Pope and Curia with joy. The future smiled upon them. Clement VII had found no shelter at Fondi or at Sperlonga, or even in the kingdom of Naples; he had fled to Avignon; the Company of San Giorgio was winning victory after victory and conquering more lands for the Holy See; Urban's enemies, such as Giovanna of Naples and Giordano Orsini, were submitting to the Pope. There was therefore another region of Italy to add to the many European states who had declared for Urban. The Pope could dream of still greater power, of a Papal realm vast enough to include at least the whole of Europe, and he could indulge his ruthless imagination by picturing to himself his rival overthrown, soon to be crushed, and the schismatic Cardinals morally and materially demolished. He also expected the Clementine Kings, Princes and prelates to return humbly to their obedience to him. In this hour of triumph, on June 12th, 1379, he launched an Encyclical that rang out like a song of victory. Events had confirmed him as the only true Head of the Church; who now could doubt of it? What sincere mind could deny the evidence of his victories? Surely God was with him. Perhaps in these joyful days he thought of Raimondo da Capua's arrival at the Court of Charles V and imagined him using all his eloquence to defend the

Urbanite cause. Perhaps he thought also that the University of Paris would listen eagerly to the arguments he expounded, and resolve finally to side with Urban, while Charles himself, struck with wonder at the Urbanite Nuncio's exposition, would repent having supported the anti-Pope and would appeal to him, the true Vicar of Christ, for mercy. Then he, Urban, with severe and ceremonial gesture, worthy of the great Papal tradition, would grant him mercy and forgiveness, and have the King at his side ever afterwards, to defend the Church.

These were bright and attractive dreams, but lasted no longer than a strip of blue sky seen between stormy clouds that part to close again. The Schism continued and was consolidated; in fact, it became still more dangerous for Urban. When Clement VII arrived in Avignon he was welcomed with great rejoicings and festivities. Charles V, with subtle political skill, encouraged his nobles to take Clement's part; the schismatic delegates worked most zealously in the European Courts, arousing sympathy and finding support. There were Saints, prelates, politicians, jurists and warriors who believed in Clement and defended him. It was no longer possible to eliminate permanently either of the contendant parties; the Pope of Rome and the Pope of Avignon were now both strong enough to stand up to each other. Even in Italy there were still skirmishes between Clementines and Urbanites, and there was always the threat of a major war with France. The Queen of Naples had submitted to the Pope to avoid a popular rising and the dissolution of her kingdom; but she was ready to return to the Clementine faith as soon as a favourable occasion presented itself. Urban VI suspected this and therefore was her enemy. In fact, in the Curia it was well known that the Pope considered Giovanna's submission to be false, and was threatening to punish her. There were rumours of negotiations between Urban and the Hungarian Ambassadors with the intention of dethroning the Queen. The Pope had not troubled to hide his aversion for her and his intention to punish her, as he showed in his Encyclical of June 1st, in which he referred to her as '*Joanna quoque olim regina Siciliae*'.

For her part, the Queen watched Urban's political activity with distrustful anxiety. Not wishing to let herself be caught in his net, she maintained close relations with the Court of France, and

especially with Louis of Anjou, hoping he might come to her help if need arose. When, however, she saw that she would receive nothing but humiliation and injury from Pope Urban, she withdrew the Ambassadors she had sent to Rome and persecuted Bishop Bozzuto and the other Urbanites in her kingdom. She sided with Clement once more, at first privately but, as soon as the General Chapter of the Franciscans, held at Naples on October 1st, 1379, had declared for him, she also publicly proclaimed her own adherence, and that of her State, to the Clementine cause.

But setting herself thus in opposition to Urban brought much nearer the fearful threat of an invasion of her kingdom by the King of Hungary. Aware of this danger and in an attempt to avert it, the next year, with Clement VII as her mediator, she recognised Louis d'Anjou as her adopted son, reserving for him all rights of succession in her realm: those same rights that she had for so long reserved for Carlo of Durazzo. This expedient was to lead to most unhappy results, but at the time it gave the Queen a sense of confidence and security. If she were attacked by the Hungarians, Louis of Anjou would be obliged to fight for her, and was powerful enough to be sure of victory. So, thought the Queen, she could be sure of remaining on the throne of Sicily during her lifetime.

Catherine, caught up in the net of Papal politics, wished the Pope to triumph, but, as we have said, her purpose differed from his. Both worked for the unity of the Church, Urban to satisfy, at least partially, his thirst for power, Catherine in the hope that men would draw closer together in concord, fear of God, goodness, love, peace and happiness. She had accepted the war as a necessary means of defeating the 'infernal devils', and she had rejoiced in the victories won by the Mercenary Companies, only as necessary preludes to greater spiritual victories in the Church. She agreed with the Pope's attempt to detach France from Clement by means of persuasion and diplomacy, because she considered the help of France to be indispensable to the Church in its effort to put an end to the Schism and establish religious unity in Europe. But she was soon to suffer disappointment, fear and grief. Her master and disciple, Fra Raimondo, was among the first to cause her suffering. She had insisted on his being sent again as Papal Nuncio to Charles V—a delicate and privileged mission

—but now he wrote to her that he had not even attempted his task. Once more he had shown himself faint-hearted. He had certainly understood that his diplomatic gifts were indispensable in those difficult circumstances, but he had been afraid of the consequences to himself. He was afraid of responsibilities, afraid of death. He was a man of little faith. Catherine was profoundly troubled as she meditated on the meaning of faith, so closely united to love. 'It seems that where there is faith there is love too, and where love is, there is faith.' He who has faith is ready to endure death, if the need arise; he whose courage fails him is without faith. Hence she concluded that there are Christians upright in thought and life but not regenerated by the Holy Spirit. Face to face with this conviction Catherine did not wish to lay the fault on others but characteristically blamed herself for the failure of Fra Raimondo's mission, and wrote to him in such a way as to show him, through her indirect accusation, how ill he had behaved. 'Am I always, because of my faithlessness, to shut the gates against Divine Providence? Alas! it is indeed so, unless Thou, O God, of Thy mercy unmake me and make me anew. Therefore, Lord, unmake me and break the hardness of my heart, that I may no longer be the clumsy tool that mars Thy work.'

We must be unmade and made anew if we wish to be real Christians. But Catherine proceeds to widen her target and accuses not herself only but Fra Raimondo too. 'And I pray you, dearest Father, to pray very fervently so that I, together with you, may be bathed in the Blood of the humble Lamb, which will make us sturdy and faithful. We shall burn with the fire of divine charity: we shall be, by His grace, doers, not undoers or spoilers.' These last words must have pierced Fra Raimondo's heart very deeply. Pondering them, he may have felt a cold sweat break out on his brow. But Catherine now attacks him more directly, no longer associating herself with him in this spiritual disloyalty to God, but accusing him alone, and somewhat sternly. 'If you had been faithful you would not have wavered so much, or felt such fear of God, and of me.' Has he realised the injury he has inflicted on the Church by withdrawing from the mission he has received from Christ-on-earth? Out of cowardice he has 'found some way of throwing the burden to the ground', and impatiently she cries: 'and if you could not get there upright, you could have gone on

all fours, and if you could not go as a Friar you could have gone as a pilgrim, and if you had no money you could have begged your way'. These are words which indicate an unbendable will, before which Fra Raimondo must have felt small and puny, and may even have trembled with shame. Catherine had put great faith in Fra Raimondo's mission and had hoped that he might win France back for Urban. She was discouraged by the failure of her spiritual father and son, and her hopes fell. She examined her conscience for the reasons for such a grave defection, and wondered if she could be the cause. She searched the innermost depths of her soul, but could find no fault there; in this matter she was clean and innocent. If the Church was threatened by disaster the fault could not be attributed to her. She had done all she could to ward off the dangers that events seemed to threaten. There was something mysterious in all that was happening; she must acknowledge it and bow her head. Not even her most fervent prayers had had the power to change the course of events; it was a sign, therefore, that God willed it so, and we must put all our trust in Him, and remain tranquil. Our inner peace must on no account be disturbed. 'So I tell you that although I wish you had gone, nevertheless I have set my mind at peace about it, because I am sure that nothing happens without its own mysterious meaning; and also because I have satisfied my conscience by doing all I could to send you to the King of France. May the Holy Spirit now have mercy on us, for we, for our part, are poor workers.'

The Saint was hoping to remodel the worthy Dominican after her own desire, but she had not realised that natures like Fra Raimondo's cannot be changed. It is impossible to make strong and daring those who naturally fear physical suffering and death. She had hoped to inspire him with her own heroic spirit, but these transformations cannot be effected from outside; it is only our own inner spirit that can change us, only by a supreme effort of our own will that the impossible can be achieved. Grace itself is powerless to act on us, against our will. Fra Raimondo was too peace-loving, too much afraid of suffering and death, to be capable of heroic energy; he loved God and mankind, but not to the point of braving dangers that could be avoided; he considered supreme sacrifices to be futile. Catherine wanted to convince him of the contrary, and reminded him that our efforts to avoid

dangers are all in vain because we can never escape them, and in this connection she quoted to him the example of the Abbot of Sant' Antimo, who 'for fear, and so as not to tempt Providence', left Siena and came to Rome, thinking by so doing to flee from imprisonment and find safety, and he was at once clapped into prison 'with that punishment you know of'. This example, however, did not suffice to shake Fra Raimondo out of his fear; he preferred to stay peacefully in Genoa preaching the Crusade against the Schismatics, rather than to brave the perils of a journey and a mission which might end in imprisonment or death.

In spite of this renewed proof of his weakness, Catherine went on urging him to be manly. 'Do not be a weak woman when the moment for action comes.' But her confident and bright hopes were doomed to failure; she saw that all her efforts were in vain, and was plunged into sadness. The reasons for this failure she now sought and found in her own faulty nature. Many other things had gone awry for her in those days, and the fault was hers alone—because of her sins and wickedness. 'Day and night I have laboured for God for many purposes, and all of these, because of the ineptitude of those who were to further them, but chiefly because of my own iniquities that hinder any good results, have been in vain'; she sees that although she has consumed so much of her ardent energy in the effort to transform evil into good, she has met with no success; she has felt her own will bend in contact with the hostile realities of life. This grieves her so much that the whole earth seems to grow dark to her, and life is no longer worth living: 'and so alas! we see ourselves overwhelmed, while the offences against God increase—and I drag on my weary life. May God in His mercy soon draw me away from this life of darkness.'

Another blow fell upon her when Queen Giovanna of Naples deserted Urban for the second time. In the last letter which we quoted Catherine had written to Fra Raimondo: 'We see in the kingdom of Naples a worse disaster than that which befell the former time'. The joy Catherine had felt when the Queen had returned to the Urbanite camp had changed to apprehension and fear. The kingdom of Naples exerted great influence in the struggle with Schism in Italy because by siding with Clement it had, to a certain extent, neutralised Urban's victories. This must be avoided, and Catherine decided to go to Naples, but was pre-

vented by the dangers of the journey, either by land or by sea. So she sent there, in August 1379, her 'diplomat' disciple, Neri di Landoccio, with the Abbot Lisolo, to propagate Urban's cause, and, with the piety of their lives and their abundant prayers, 'to atone for all the offences they see committed against God'. They were to try to speak to the Queen also, and to convince her that the Schism was an impiety. Catherine wrote directly to the Queen, a letter distilled from her tears, a supreme effort of persuasion. She tried to break Giovanna's heart so that she might offer it, in sacrifice, to God. Catherine loved Giovanna. She had never met her but she had carried on an eager interchange of letters with her. The last missive she had received from the Queen had been particularly welcome, because it had announced her abandonment of the anti-Pope and her return to the Urbanite obedience. Catherine had accepted this as a divine answer to her own ceaseless prayers and intercessions. Now, however, she had seen that the Queen was not sincere and that the Pope was right to distrust her. Her grief was therefore great. She had nursed some illusions about Giovanna's future; she had imagined her taking an important part in the Crusade against the infidels; she had dreamt of her as the defender of the Church and a loyal friend to herself and to Urban. This relapse of Giovanna's into schism was like the clean cut of a knife that lopped off her desires and hopes. Catherine's disconsolate soul was filled with melancholy. Nevertheless, she never despaired; the light that shone within her soul might languish and grow pale, but it never flickered out. Her moral sufferings, her distress for mankind 'made of the off-scourings of the earth', grieved her and caused her pain but could not darken her lively and confident soul. She was an apostle and so she could never fail to bear love to all men, and never cease her labours for the salvation of their souls.

Queen Giovanna was, without doubt, a tremendous sinner, but none the less she was one of God's creatures. She had rebelled against Christ's Vicar on earth to follow the anti-Christ and his incarnate devils; but she had a soul that must not be left to damn itself. However severe the punishment she justly deserved, she could not be abandoned to herself. She must be sought out, loved, corrected; in the end Christ would triumph in her soul. So Catherine wrote to the Queen with a sad heart, but from this

sadness found a message of love. She did not refer to the punishment Urban intended to inflict on her—the confiscation of her kingdom, nor to the negotiations concluded between Urban VI and the King of Hungary, the other Louis of Anjou, to her injury. Catherine probably considered that material punishments were the legitimate consequence of the evil she had done, and therefore must be accepted reasonably and humbly. They were in the logical order of things. She wanted to save the Kingdom of Naples for Urban, and Giovanna's soul for God. Therefore she pleaded with the Queen to abandon 'the darkness of heresy', and return to the true Church. Giovanna had been guilty of pride because she had not recollected herself in prayer and meditation so as to arrive at the knowledge of her own 'not being'; nor had she ever wished to confess to herself that she, like all the rest of mankind, was but 'a sack full of stench, offensive on every side'. Through this lack of serious thought the Queen had been irreverent towards the Vicar of Christ, and because she had no self-knowledge she had fallen into ignorance, which makes men like brutish beasts. But when did a human creature ever wish to be considered a 'brutish beast'? Certainly Queen Giovanna would not wish this. So she must turn to the light, that would be revealed to her in the 'cell of self-knowledge', the only light that nourishes 'the beauty and dignity of the soul'. If she wished to be a real Queen she must robe herself in divine splendour, crown herself with celestial truth. She must think, moreover, that she had inalienable duties towards her unhappy subjects, now plunged, as the sad result of her own conduct, into the misery of civil strife. 'How is it that your heart does not break', she asks her, 'to see your subjects divided because of you, one choosing the white rose and another the crimson rose, one holding to the truth and another to falsehood? Yet your subjects were all alike created from the pure white rose of the eternal will of God, and re-born in grace, in that most ardent crimson rose of Christ's Blood, in which Blood we were washed from sin by holy baptism, for God has ransomed us Christians and gathered us all together in the garden of Holy Church.' All creatures are then glorious and subject to baptism which is the privilege of the Church and may only be obtained by means of the supreme Pontiff who holds the keys of the Blood: Pope Urban VI.

According to Catherine, the Queen understood well the righteousness of Urban's cause; but it was not enough to know this, as Giovanna had confessed to her in a letter a short while back; she must express this knowledge in active co-operation and obedience. She must answer for her disloyalty to Urban and must accept the punishment she had deserved; after all, her own declarations made at the time she abandoned Clement were enough to condemn her now. There were no excuses, no extenuating circumstances. Catherine could not believe that Giovanna's letter to her had been insincere, or her conversion to Urban's cause merely feigned. She was too optimistic to imagine that Giovanna had been employing subterfuge or political cunning in her dealings with her—therefore this time also she thought she herself must be the cause of the persistence of evil in the Queen. For this reason divine justice was causing her, Catherine, to suffer; was it not a great grief to know that Giovanna was now an enemy of the Church? The letter the Queen had sent to her was undoubtedly sincere, but immediately afterwards her intellect had been darkened through following the advice of wicked counsellors and allowing herself to become subject to diabolical illusions. At present Giovanna was indulging in a false slumber, from which she must awake to return to the sincerity of heart that had dictated the letter that had filled Catherine with such joy. She must decide at once, however, and not let other harmful days go by, for time passes never to return. 'Sweetest mother, for the love of Christ Crucified, be sweet to me and not bitter; return to your own self and slumber no longer in this sleep of falsehood, but arouse yourself in the little time that is left to you. Do not wait on time, for it will not wait on you.' Her prayer becomes more eloquent: 'Acknowledge the great goodness of God and His mercy towards you, embrace virtue, return to Urban VI who will welcome you as a daughter. . . . For the love of Christ Crucified do not linger any more in what is death for your soul, lest this wretched and scandalous infamy should linger after your own death. For the death of the body follows hard after you all the time, after you as after everyone else, and especially after those who have completed the course of their youth.'

With these words Catherine is trying to prepare the Queen for death, or rather to receive with resignation a possible command

from Urban VI to withdraw to a convent to live a life of penance. She would have had to obey such an order at once, and therefore it was necessary for her, from now onwards, to convince herself that she had done great harm to the Church, harm for which she could make reparation only by placing herself wholly in the hands of the Pope of Rome. The Saint knew that, virtually, Giovanna had already been deposed, and it is almost as if she wished to surround her with the warmest affection, so that she might still feel a Queen, but in the inner realm of the spirit.

The year 1379 brought another grief to Catherine, a sorrow more circumscribed than those we have been considering, but nevertheless most poignant, caused by the sad end of Giannozzo Sacchetti. Giannozzo had felt a poet's enthusiasm for the saintly Catherine, a sincere but passing love; Catherine instead loved him like a dear son. She hoped she had converted him finally, and enlightened his dark soul; but Giannozzo soon forgot the teaching, counsels, prayers and love of his 'little Mother' and let himself be dragged into politics, which led him later on into a disastrous quagmire. He may often have remembered the peace he had felt when in spiritual communion with the saint, but his will was not strong enough for him to be a faithful disciple. He was exiled from Florence and joined the Hungarian army in the siege of Treviso; then he got involved in the preparation of a plot against the Florentine government, for which purpose he returned to Florence. There he was denounced, discovered, arrested and tried, and on October 18th, 1379, he was executed. He had already been arrested in the previous April in Florence, we are told for debt, and had been imprisoned in the gaol called the 'Stinche'. Catherine had heard of this and been distressed for him. She wrote to Francesco di Pipino, who had been to visit him in prison, to thank him for his kind action, and ordered him never to abandon Giannozzo, but to help him to the extent of his power. She begged him also to give a message to her unhappy friend: 'Tell him from me that he must be a good knight, now that God has set him in the field, and his weapon must be true patience, humbly bowing his head to the sweet will of God'. She thought he had been wrongly accused, and defended him. Perhaps she was right in considering him innocent; in fact, shortly afterwards he was released. Catherine had promised to write to him directly, but we

do not know whether she did this. In any case, Giannozzo's sad fate could no longer be averted, and the Saint's spirit could exercise no further influence over him, nor hold him back from the abyss into which he was falling.

Little by little Catherine's political activity decreased as she concentrated all her energy in her religious life. Fawtier exaggerated when he asserted that 'during 1379 and 1380 her pre-occupations became strictly religious, as if, feeling her end approaching, she was beginning to detach herself from the things of this world'. We have seen that for Catherine politics could not be considered apart from religion, and therefore a truly religious person had to be politically minded also, though naturally the converse was not true. Towards the end of 1379 we begin to notice, in her surviving letters, a diminution of political interest, not due, however, to the thought of her approaching end, but more probably because the political ideas she defended no longer aroused a lively interest in her circle.

Once Clement VII had established himself in Avignon and had the support of France, it was no longer possible to foresee an early end to the Schism. Urban VI became more and more intolerant and autocratic. He gladly received Catherine in frequent audiences, but used her only for political missions of minor importance. The Queen of Naples, even after receiving Catherine's latest appeal, gave no sign of having repented her relapse into schism. The kingdom of Naples seemed likely to become the scene of cruel warfare between the French, led by the Duke of Anjou, and the Hungarians, led by Carlo of Durazzo. Here and there in Italy and in other parts of Europe the war dragged on. Almost all thought of a future Crusade had vanished, and the Curia of Rome was busy challenging the Curia of Avignon, both sides bolstering up their causes not only with denunciations, accusations, excommunications and threats, but with any other violent means they could find, as if the Church were a courtesan disputed between rival contentants. The judgment pronounced by the monks of Saint Denys was crude but true: Clementines and Urbanites, 'afire with passion, tried to rob each other of possession of the Church as if they had found her in a bawdy house'. In such an atmosphere of strife no wonder the morality of the clergy became corrupt, and the faithful, bewildered and

disgusted, grew indifferent or sceptical. Such great fissures appeared in the fabric of the Church that men feared it might crash to the ground. Even the Dominican Order, which had remained compact since its foundation, became divided and enfeebled, showing signs of decadence, after the Master General of the Order, Elia of Toulouse, had transferred his allegiance to Clement. Catherine's plan of instituting in Rome a Council of pious and holy men to guide the Church and the Pope seemed to have failed in its purpose. In such a state of chaos what could Catherine do? To whom could she turn for help for the reform she so much desired?

Today we can see that these painful and inconclusive ordeals through which the Church was passing served to renew its strength. This grave crisis was needed to teach it to adapt itself to the new political principles of European States; but Catherine could not foresee this or realise that the Schism had its own profound reasons, inasmuch as it helped men to be more conscious of eternal religious values, and better able to distinguish them from power proceeding from mere territorial possession or individual supremacy. Did the Schism not compel the faithful to desire a pure and disinterested Church? In this way, even in its apparent negations, it contributed to the process of the Church's evolution. If Catherine had been able to foresee its historical consequences she would have ceased from her efforts to propagate the cause of Urban VI, and she would have directed all her energies towards her own salvation and that of her fellows. But her ideas were those of the Middle Ages, in which she lived. Her judgments on contemporary events were related to the immediate consequences that might be expected to derive from them, and as in that moment the Church appeared to be on the brink of ruin, her suffering was acute.

She was certainly aware of the general collapse at the end of the fourteenth century in Rome and most of Italy; she wished to check it, and for her the only remedy seemed to lie in the re-acquired unity of the Church. This unity, which was to heal the world's wounds, was the constant theme of her sermons; she never ceased to proclaim Urban VI as sole Vicar of Christ, without whom there would be no peace or happiness among men.

This theme runs through all the letters she wrote in 1379, and

inspired all the political activity entrusted to her by the Pope. It may seem to us of very limited scope, but how could it have been otherwise? Where could Catherine have found other vital ideas, or essential elements for political propaganda? For her Urban's legitimacy signified the unity of the Church: hence her enthusiasm. She grafted an institutional concept of external and transient character on to her religious faith, so that it acquired the golden reflections of her own fervour.

Fawtier, reflecting on the significance of the Orations Catherine composed in 1379, concludes with the assertion that the Saint, disillusioned by the conduct of men, was appealing to God to have mercy on mankind that seemed to have no conscience. 'These prayers give us important indications of Catherine's state of mind during her last years, while she was in Rome and could judge at their true worth those to whose cause she had dedicated herself. Does the frequency of these prayers indicate an unfavourable verdict? Are we to believe that the spectacle of human weaknesses had led her, more than in former years, to set all her hope of success, particularly in Church reform, in God alone?' The Orations, to which Fawtier refers, belong mostly to February and March of 1379, but surely we are not to believe that it was only during those months that Catherine felt the need to entrust to God alone the destinies of His Church? Her state of mind in 1379, as we infer it from her Orations, had not changed since she wrote the 'Dialogue'. Do we not find in the 'Dialogue', even more than in the Orations, the expression of her need to confide the course of all human events to God's hands, because men seemed incapable of constructive skill? We must always remember that Catherine was above all a Religious, and so the sense of the divine predominated in her. Nor should it be forgotten that the pessimism, which rises in her soul at the sight of men's vile actions, is never absolute, just as it is never absolute in any Christian; she dominates it by virtue of her inborn certainty that souls can and must be saved at all costs; this comes to pass through the will and power of God, certainly, but also through the operation of men. In an Oration dated February 20th, 1379, turning to God to give Him thanks, she says: 'Thou hast deigned to choose me for this work', that is, so that through the labour of God's servants, 'a wall may be built to prop up Holy Church'. Her faith in her own

labours, and consequently in those of others too, remained strong, and she was always eager to act for the good of men. She was a social apostle, *par excellence*, and therefore thought it was her duty to spend her last energies for the salvation of the Church and its reform; it mattered little whether she met with disappointment.

Therefore, if Catherine's political activity was more limited towards the end of 1379, the reason is not to be found in the unfavourable judgment she is obliged to formulate about the men for whom she is fighting and hoping for victory; but in the fact that she had no other thesis to put forward but that of the legitimacy of Pope Urban, in whose cause all sacrifices must be made. His triumph was to lead to the unity of the Church, and thence to a general confession of faith in Christ which would bind all men as brothers; only thus could they arrive at the reign of peace and universal well-being on earth; a heavenly prelude to the other Heaven, to be enjoyed after the death of the body.

The unity of the Church, for Catherine, was a supreme aim that justified and legitimised even war, which she otherwise condemns. The letter she wrote to Louis I, King of Hungary and Poland, is a proof of this. In it she begs the King to come down swiftly into Southern Italy, to fight for Urban against the Schismatics. She almost commands him to abandon any other war, however important it may seem to him. 'You must make peace with all your other enemies', she says, because enmity and warfare are atrocious things and keep men far removed from virtue and love; instead, war against the enemies of the Church is holy, being the fruit of love for Christ. It may be that the political content of this letter was suggested to her by the Pope, as the following passage suggests: 'Have pity on our Father, Pope Urban VI, who watches with great sadness his little sheep being borne away by the infernal wolf. It is true he finds his only consolation in his Creator, for he has set his hope and faith in Him alone. And he still hopes that God will inspire you to take up this burden [the war against Giovanna of Naples] for the honour of God and of Holy Church.' The conception of a holy war to convert and unify men—a conception that struck deep roots in Christianity—reappears in Catherine and is ardently defended.

Today we deplore any war not waged to defend a nation's natural boundaries, but Catherine deplored every war that was

not to defend the ideal boundaries of the Church. As the Church stands for order, unity and love, whoever introduces disorder, confusion, division and hatred is an enemy of the Church and therefore to be eliminated. If this enemy is an entire people, or a strong ruler, then recourse must be had to a just war, to restore the peace and unity of Christendom. 'The whole world is torn asunder; it is running on the road to Hell, and no one can stop it', she wrote to Louis of Hungary, who had fought for the Crusades and was a powerful supporter of Urban VI. She appealed to him anxiously to fight for Christ and His Vicar, and in this way to reduce, at least partially, the division that was ruining the Church. He must come, and speedily: 'But I beg you to come, and to delay no longer'.

Catherine was impatient, and so was Pope Urban VI. The King of Hungary's army was about to arrive at Treviso, where it was to join the Genoese and Francesco da Carrara in fighting Venice; but such a war might drag on for a long time, and in the meantime the Schismatics would have time to reinforce themselves, while the Hungarian army was growing weaker; afterwards, what would happen? The Pope feared for his pontificate, Catherine for the future peace of the world. Her appeal became more urgent. Who supported the Schism except Clement VII and Queen Giovanna? It was therefore an imperative duty to overthrow these two leaders: 'and will you permit the anti-Christ, the limb of Satan, and a mere woman to overthrow all our faith in darkness and confusion?' She added: 'And if you and the other leaders who have the power, do not act now with energy and diligence, you will be ashamed of this before God, and severely rebuked for the negligence and lukewarmness of your hearts'.

Catherine's ingenuousness, in spite of the warmth of her appeal, must have amused Louis of Hungary if he read her letter. It seemed to her a most natural thing for the King to break off his war against Venice, simply declaring that henceforward he considered himself to be a friend of the Serenissima Republic, because he was resolved to undertake none but just wars, that is, wars against enemies of the Church. What consequences would such a declaration have had beyond arousing discontent and rancour among his allies, who would have proceeded with their war against Venice without his aid? But Catherine was sure that once

the King of Hungary had conquered the kingdom of Naples peace would once more descend, at least in Italy, and the unity of the Church, her constant aim, would be achieved. Her hopes shone even brighter: as soon as Queen Giovanna heard that Louis was marching his army towards Naples she would at once return to her loyalty to Urban. So there would be no battles, no deeds of violence. 'Much good will result from your coming', she wrote to the King; 'perhaps this truth will triumph without the need for human intervention, and this poor little Queen will turn from her obstinacy, either for fear or for love.' A complicated political and religious problem could hardly be solved with more simplicity! But the solution, in spite of its attractions, remained but a Utopian dream.

In support of Urban's campaign against Queen Giovanna, Catherine wrote also to Messer Carlo of Durazzo, the general commanding the Hungarian troops in the war against Venice. Some historians have been amazed to see the Saint begging help for the Church from a man so depraved in feeling and conduct, but it must not be forgotten that Catherine was in the Pope's service, and he must certainly have done all he could, personally or through his Curia, to persuade Catherine that excellent and lasting good may be achieved even by evil means.

Carlo of Durazzo, called also Messer Carlo della Pace, belonged, like the King of Hungary and the Queen of Naples, to the Angevin dynasty. He had been brought up at Giovanna's Court and had married her niece Margarita. He was intelligent, fond of the sciences and of poetry, and full of ambition, longing to have a kingdom of his own. The Queen of Naples was fond of him and treated him with royal generosity, even declaring him, while he was still at her Court, the heir to her throne. He was shrewd but dishonest, and has remained famous for his ingratitude and cruelty. Among the many public and private deeds that sullied his name the most execrable was this war he undertook against his former protectress and benefactress, and, most infamous of all, his responsibility for her assassination. Gardner is right in affirming that no excuse can be found for the conduct of this wretched man who was rich, powerful and in favour with the King of Hungary, and might therefore have been expected to control the ambition which led him to stain himself so shamefully. Nor is it possible

to justify Urban VI for having made use of this unprincipled man for his own purpose, urging him to possess himself of the kingdom of Naples and even crowning him as King.

Catherine wrote to him to beg him to hasten down into Italy to fight the Schismatics, using words like those she had used in her appeal to Louis of Hungary: 'Come speedily, and do not delay, for God will be with you. There is no time to wait, for delay is dangerous. Then come and hide yourself in the ark of Holy Church, under the wing of your Father Urban VI, who holds the keys of Christ's Blood.' Why was he to 'hide' in the ark of Holy Church and place himself under the Pope's protection? Was Messer Carlo not himself coming to defend the Pope and the Church? But Catherine knew of his depraved life, and therefore she wished him to submit to a seven-fold process of purification before he became the Church's paladin. It would have been impossible to accuse the Schismatics of licentious life if men of impure morals were to be employed in Urban's cause. Therefore almost the whole of her letter to Carlo of Durazzo is a sermon with a purifying purpose—a very long sermon because Catherine finds it difficult to arrive at the main theme of her letter and invitation. Warnings follow warnings, with repeated reflections on the necessity of having a pure soul, almost as if the Saint could not find words powerful enough to convince her correspondent of sin, and cleanse his soul to make it more worthy of the task to which he had been called. In certain points the letter is a real, if veiled, act of accusation. The 'wicked pleasures', the 'slime of filth', the 'perverse law that binds our members', the 'degrading thought' are deliberately mentioned, so that Carlo may see his own darkened soul, as in a glass. She quotes historical and moral examples to jolt his conscience, speaks of the vices and virtues, and tries to make them real to him. Her reflections on Christian nobility are intended to make him give up his dissipated way of life and rebuild for himself another, all purity and love. After such a wealth of meditations and reflections she thinks she has prepared the ground sufficiently for the conversion of Carlo della Pace, and so she writes to him: 'God has chosen you to support Holy Church, so that you may be an instrument for rooting out heresy, confounding falsehood, and exalting the truth, dissolving the darkness and revealing the light of Pope Urban'.

One wonders whether Catherine really thought that her words would act like purifying fire on Carlo of Durazzo, destroying the seed of corruption in his soul. It is quite possible that she believed that, after reading her letter, he would eagerly follow her advice, and so make himself worthy of the undertaking which she confided to him, for she was an irrepressible optimist and always expected the best from everyone. Her desire to see him become 'a manly knight' was so great that little by little it transformed itself, first into hope, then into certainty. 'I know you will be manly', she tells him, 'you will try to accomplish God's will without any thought for yourself.' She seems already to enjoy a foretaste of his conversion, and is sure that her enthusiasm must make the soldier who reads her words desire to purify himself. But complete purification does not lie within her power; she can incite souls to turn to God, and lead them to the altar of repentance, no further; for complete purification they need the Pope's help and his responsibility. With her own fervent faith she can prepare Carlo for righteousness, but the conclusive act of cleansing belongs to the Pope alone. If Urban loosens him from his black sins Carlo may become a manly knight. Urban alone holds the keys of Christ's Blood; unless he, the guardian, unlock the treasure house, there will be no total cleansing. That is why Carlo must shelter beneath the wing of his Father to receive full absolution and salvation. Catherine entrusts the conscience of the Condottiero of the Hungarians to Urban, who is to become responsible for his purity of intentions. Can we really blame her for her misplaced trust in Messer della Pace, who came to fight Giovanna of Naples, not for the Church's benefit or glory but to satisfy his own ambition and lust for power? After defeating the militia of Otto of Brunswick he took Queen Giovanna prisoner and had her strangled. This crime casts an ugly shadow over him and, we must admit, also over those who invited him to fight the Queen. Yet Catherine had no part in these shameful events, for although she also appealed to him to take up arms against Giovanna she did so very unwillingly, and chiefly to satisfy the wish of the Pope, to whom after all, as we have seen, she entrusted the final purification of the Angevin's intentions. If Urban did not take any pains to cleanse Carlo's conscience, Catherine cannot be held responsible, and the reproach must be cast at the Pope himself, who welcomed

Carlo with praises and festive rejoicing, exculpating and blessing him and finally crowning him King of Apulia, that is, of Naples.

Her interview with the Pope, her attendance at various offices of the Curia to ask for news and instructions and to beg for Indulgences for her friends and disciples, took up a great deal of Catherine's time and wearied her. In her own house there was a continual coming and going of foreigners, sight-seers, admirers, disciples and friends, especially those who came from Siena, whom she helped and consoled in many ways. All could be guests at her table, and food had to be found for all by sending her fellow Tertiaries to beg alms in the streets of Rome, or by going herself to do so. Then there was the time she spent at Mass and after her Communion, the time passed in private prayer, meditation and ecstasy, in visiting churches and attending services, in speaking of sacred subjects with theologians and ascetics, and the many hours spent in charitable work of all kinds, dictating letters, receiving the visits of petitioners for spiritual or material gifts, and advising her disciples—all this is but a slight idea of her laborious and exhausting days. Because of her so many preoccupations she had to neglect a little her distant disciples. She would have liked to have all her Caterinati, particularly her Sieneſe followers, in Rome, united around herself, to cheer them with her smile, preach to them her fiery sermons, and inspire them with the longing for perfection, joy and heavenly bliss. Not being able to do this, she followed them in thought, offering them constantly to God, and procured for them Indulgences to help them to keep their souls on the spiritual heights. She had perforce to reduce her epistolary correspondence; perhaps she thought she had already infused into her disciples enough fire of charity to keep them united with her in thought and prayer, and bound to each other too, were it but to honour her and conform to the spirit that animated her. This was the hope of a Saint and a Saint's illusion. Her Sieneſe disciples felt forsaken as soon as they were left alone, and soon dispersed. Cristoforo Guidini was already writing to his friend Pagliaresi on January 14th, 1379: "Tell our little Mother that we are all fallen apart; she must give us some rule which, out of respect for her, we can obey, and which may gather us together in memory of her, and she must write to us sometimes, remembering her little lost sheep—although, to be sure, we know that

she remembers us constantly in her prayers'. Her disciples were sure that Catherine prayed for them, but they were incapable of that effort of inner concentration which would have made them feel her alive and still near to them; they did not vibrate with the same feelings and thoughts that made her a friend of God; they were still children in the ways of the spirit. The notary Guidini confessed with sorrow that the Caterinati were all dispersed less than two months after Catherine's departure, and he had reason to be sorrowful, for it was a proof that they had never learnt through self-knowledge, but always needed to be advised, ruled and inspired by her. Begging their Mother to call them together once more and remember her little lost sheep, they showed that in spite of their love for Catherine and their longing to have her always near them, they had never assimilated her spirit.

When Neri di Landoccio gave his friend Guidini's message to their Mother Catherine must have felt some disappointment at receiving this proof of her failure to infuse into her disciples the love that would have held them together. After all her teaching and all the streams of spiritual light she had poured over them, she still found them fleshly-minded, as St Paul would have said. It was not a consoling result, but it is the destiny of nearly all men to remain such disciples all their lives. Very few can create their own intimate life of the soul, in which they may reach the freedom that permits them to share in the universal communion. Most men never find themselves, and even when taught to do so they never succeed in freeing themselves of the bonds of the senses, but demand rules, methods, guides—are constantly in need of masters and pastors. When these fail them they lose heart, and despair. Catherine understood her children's spiritual weakness, and perhaps it was after receiving Guidini's sad and affectionate appeal that she wrote to Maconi: 'Comfort all those children of mine, and tell them, one and all, that they must forgive me if I do not write, because it is very difficult for me just now'. She always hoped for support from her disciples, and during 1379, when she needed their help in enterprises very near to her, she saw how half-heartedly or unwillingly they answered her call. On December 9th, 1379, she gave Maconi an important charge, and revealed how well she knew her disciples' weakness when she told him: 'Be fervent in this work, and not lukewarm, and spur on your

elder brothers of the Company to do all they can in this matter I am writing to you about. If you will only be what you ought to be, you will set fire to all Italy, not only just where you are.' But she alone possessed this spiritual fire, and although she knew how to kindle it in the consciences of her disciples they did not learn how to fan it to a flame in their hearts, so as to diffuse it in Siena and the rest of Italy.

Although it was very difficult for Catherine, during her stay in Rome, to write letters to her disciples, we have nevertheless a considerable number dictated during 1379. Some are short notes, reminders, messages, announcements, reproofs or warnings; others are detailed spiritual instructions, analyses of Christian living, reflections on the love of God, or on intellectual light, and some letters are like tracts on asceticism or mysticism, vivified by personal experience. If we except half-a-dozen of these letters, sent to friends in Milan, Genoa, Padua, Venice, Orvieto and Toscanella, the others are addressed, for the most part, to the Caterinati in Siena, Florence and Naples. Her correspondents were not numerous. In Siena was Maconi, in Florence Francesco di Pipino and his wife; in Naples she wrote to several people because she wanted all her faithful to try to influence the conscience of the Queen and people of Naples in Urban's favour.

Catherine's religious personality is revealed in these letters of 1379 as substantially the same as that revealed in her 'Dialogue', though it does not stand out in such bold relief. The letters show no loftier flights and no more intimate knowledge of the human heart. They are more highly coloured and more personal, but less intense and thoughtful than the 'Dialogue'. In the latter we find abstractions which some critics, we think mistakenly, consider weaken the force of her spiritual inspiration, whereas in her letters it is feeling that predominates, and overpowers us. If one were to compare the 'Dialogue' and the spiritual letters to two different kinds of landscape, one could say that her letters have the hot vibrant colours of a southern scene, which fills us with instant joy. Everything stands out clearly: the varied colours of earth, trees, crops, herbs, flowers, people and mountains are all as distinct as if they issued fresh from the artist's hand; there is a vigorous vitality in the shades, the curving lines, the perspective. Life could not be presented with greater spontaneity and exuber-

ance; our eyes are dazzled by such a radiant, spacious and joyous vision: we are enraptured.

The 'Dialogue', instead, is rather like those grey, subdued landscapes which, because they are the fruit of a profound and meditative creative art, seem remote from actual life. At first sight they baffle our searching glance; we must observe them very attentively to discern their vital warmth. These landscapes with their hues of greenish grey, pearly violet, silvery rose and faded yellow may be persuaded to yield up to us a wide range of colours and to reveal a profound creative sense; nevertheless, most onlookers will prefer scenes that present more vivid colours and contours with less mystery. Hence most readers prefer Catherine's devout letters to her 'Dialogue', because the latter requires a great effort to be understood.

Certainly, the letters are full of human appeal, for Catherine was writing in an attempt to form real Christians; she urges men to love, shows the way to purity of conscience, to the divine light in which the soul must bathe itself, to happiness. She neglects no detail of healthy living, and it would be easy to extract from the letters a manual of wisdom more vital than the philosophy of the Stoics, more lofty than that of the Platonists, for, although less closely and profoundly reasoned than these, it is more loving and all-embracing. In these letters of 1379 the usual themes recur: self-knowledge and the knowledge of God; the three enemies of man that must be overcome: the world, the flesh and the devil; men must shun vice and pursue virtue; they must be just and enforce justice in others; they must bathe in the Blood of Christ; practise charity; kindle the fire of divine love; be humble, faithful and pure; seek perfection; read in Christ as in a book wherein all wisdom is to be found; despise wealth; suffer with others; yearn with love for others; soar in prayer to God . . . all subjects that the Saint divides and sub-divides, finding ever new elements for continuous meditation.

She wanted to see her disciples grow more like herself and so she poured out for them all the best her heart and mind could offer. Wherever she passed she touched all hearts with her angelic smile, and had more power than Dante's Beatrice to make men nobler and gentler. Sometimes her words re-echoed the emotion she felt in her familiar conversations with God, but her disciples

did not understand her and wondered at the expression of her face and voice, which they could not interpret in the language of the spirit. When she was far away her children eagerly awaited her letters that soothed their hearts and filled them with heavenly joy. She did not succeed in giving them her wisdom in the ways of God, but she inspired them with such faith and veneration that as soon as she left them they felt lost and even longed for death.

She wrote to some new disciples and friends during the second half of 1379. They were priests or gentlewomen, or devout simple Neapolitans. There was the Florentine Bartolomeo Usimbardi with his wife Orsa, the Carthusian Pietro of Milan, the Venetian bishop Correr, and, most interesting of all, the Sienese Andrea Vanni. He was already a painter and politician before he came under Catherine's influence. He belonged to the Government of the Reformers, and held various diplomatic posts under the Commune of Siena. In 1373, when Gonfaloniere of Justice, he was sent as Ambassador to Gregory XI in Avignon; in 1376 he was appointed Rector of the Cathedral Office of Works; in September and October 1379 he was an elected Captain of the People. Perhaps through some of his friends among the Caterinati such as Cristoforo Guidini, he was brought into contact with the Saint; we do not know when or why. We know that he became her friend. Catherine wrote him three letters, presumably during these two months of office, but these letters tell us nothing of the time or degree of their friendship. As they have come down to us they contain only exhortations and advice. We gather only that Catherine does not treat Vanni with the familiarity she generally showed to her favourite disciples. She warns and counsels him affectionately, but her tone is somewhat reserved. She wants him to be just and devout; she begs him to be humble, to observe the commandments of God, but she does not seek to impose her will on him. 'And I beg you, dearest son, in your present situation to be reasonable and just to the humble as well as to the great, to the poor as to the rich; and give to each one equally his due, according to holy justice, tempered with mercy.' And she develops this theme of justice more amply: 'to be just with others we must first be just with ourselves; the many evil happenings in Siena, in Italy, in the world are all caused by the lack of justice; justice makes us severe towards those who sin against it, justice is not out

for its own ends, or for the advantage of those near and dear, but for the universal good of all'.

Justice must be accompanied by humility, which is like low-lying ground in which 'the tree of life' is planted. Stormy winds blow from the heights, devastating all, but on reaching the valley they become feeble and are soon spent. Pride, impure thoughts, offences, mockery and insults are the stormy winds that are powerless against a humble soul, for humility is rooted in love and bears fruits of patience and many other virtues. He who possesses humility is sheltered from all evil. Andrea Vanni must possess justice, humility and patience and he will be a strong man. Did this mean that Catherine considered him weak and inconstant? Perhaps that is why she wrote: 'wishing to see you constant and persevering in virtues, not like a leaf that turns in the wind'. This phrase alone is not enough to sketch for us the character of Andrea Vanni, but it may be accepted as suggesting the truth.

We can form no picture of Andrea from Catherine's three letters to him, but he showed his utter devotion to her in painting her portrait. Art historians, critics and scholars agree in recognising its authenticity; Fawtier alone denies it. His arguments are subtle and thoughtful, but neither exhaustive nor convincing. For example, he ignores the testimony of the 'Necrologi di San Domenico di Siena', in which it is asserted that Gabriele di Davino Piccolomini was buried on November 12th, 1399, in the Church (of San Domenico) in the corner near the Chapel of the Tertiaries, 'underneath the portrait of the blessed Catherine of Siena'. This picture is in fact the portrait of the Saint which in 1667 was cut out, by order of the Marquis Ferdinando di Vandeneinden, and re-set in the Cappella delle Volte, where everyone, from that day to this, has been able to admire it.

Fawtier is surely mistaken when, to prove that the portrait is not Vanni's work, he compares it with other works by the same painter, and particularly with the polyptich in the Church of Santo Stefano alla Lizza. He will not admit that they are by the same artist because they do not present identical characteristics; but this is absurd because the two works are born of totally different inspirations. The polyptich was made to order, and although it is grandiose and gives proof of remarkable intellectual effort, it shows none of that emotion with which the memory of a

dearly loved person may enrich a work of art. The portrait of Catherine is a spontaneous tribute of affection, and therefore has a spirituality of its own, while the polyptich remains a picture of more purely external appeal. The difference in origin of these two pictures explains the coldness and hardness we notice in the Madonna and Child Jesus of the polyptich, and the softness, sensitiveness and vibrant warmth we find in the Saint's portrait. The picture represents an attentive application of some artistic canons of Sienese painting of the fourteenth century; the portrait represents a unique effort on the part of the painter, who wants to escape from conventional designs to grasp and portray the mystical atmosphere which surrounded Catherine, and which he had felt and admired. Therefore it is natural that her portrait should be lively and show the touch of a loving hand. Moreover, Fawtier's artistic canons, by means of which he would like to demolish all proof of the authenticity of Catherine's portrait, do not really stand up to criticism. He asserts that the polyptich is Vanni's, and that it has certain qualities in common with the portrait; then he proceeds to point out the differences. In the Madonna of the polyptich 'the face is rounder, the eyes more open, the lips less full and, finally, the hands quite different in that the fingers, instead of tapering, are square at the ends, and with an exaggerated space between each one'. According to Fawtier, then, Andrea Vanni should have painted Catherine as identical with the Madonna of the polyptich, even if she was in actual fact different, or else he should have reproduced Catherine's portrait as his Madonna in order to be recognised as the artist responsible for both. He should have foregone that beauty of half-shut eyes and drooping glance which he must so often have admired, and we should not have seen the pupil, half-disclosed, that gazes downwards and yet seems to see worlds far removed, and the gleaming white of the cornea that draws our attention, outshining the other whites of her lilies and wimple. All this he should have renounced, lest anyone should cast a doubt on his authorship. As for her hands, if Catherine's were delicate and tapering—and surely Andrea must often have observed and admired them—why ought he to have drawn them as short and square? When he painted Catherine's portrait he clearly remembered her appearance and was trying to be faithful to this lively memory, whereas when he

painted his Madonna he was following a convention and so observed more closely the instructions of his school.

Like all her disciples, Andrea Vanni had come under Catherine's fascinating spell, but instead of showing his devotion in letters full of fervent and melancholy love, as the others did, he painted her, after her death, in a fresco which has great pictorial beauty, but which is, above all, the loving record of his love and an attempt to represent in the Saint's figure the elevation of the human spirit to the point of union with God.

In his portrait Catherine, in queenly humility, seems to partake of both earth and heaven, and all around her is an atmosphere of peace. She is not in an ecstasy; she regards the devout woman disciple, who kneels at her feet, with tenderness and calm; her half-shut eyes hold the beauty of heaven. Her nose is strongly formed and contrasts with the sad but loving mouth. The lines of her profile, when carefully observed, are soft and yielding; the shadows seem lit from within. The perfect oval of her face is gentle and sweet and of indescribable beauty. Her expression changes; sometimes she has a look of mortal weariness, which gives her the appearance of a mature woman, sometimes her face is suffused with energy that rises from the depths of her soul and renews her youth. One might read in her face the experience of centuries and think she knew the dread secrets of the dark abyss and the harmony of the heavenly spheres. Desires, too, are there, but clear and bright like the sun's rays.

The folds of her wimple veil a brow accustomed to profound reasonings that can keep pace with the powerful impulses of her heart. It is a vast brow, for vast were the thoughts that dwelt there, which knew of one barrier only, God Himself. Everything else must be clearly illumined and understood, because for her the intellect was light.

Here Catherine is as if seen in a vision, yet none the less a woman of flesh and blood. Flesh and blood like ourselves, because like us she suffers and loves. Like us she knows enthusiasm and dejection, but unlike us she knows how to deny herself for the sake of men, and she loves God above all else. The consolations she gives are gentle, subtle and suggestive; her will is unbreakable. She smiles at us rather mournfully, and we are compelled to rise and follow her.

The devoted woman who kneels before her adds to the impression of her greatness. As she kisses the finger-tips of the Saint's right hand she seems to be imploring for herself the miraculous power that flows from that slender hand. Perhaps Vanni also had felt this devotion and had felt the distance that separates a poor mortal from a Saint. In the suppliant's eyes there is a longing for a better world, the same longing the painter himself had felt when he had begun to love and follow Catherine.

The artist and mystic had met and understood each other. The mystic revealed to the artist some of the secrets of God, and the artist, with his unerring intuition, saw deeply into the Saint's heart, and was inspired to portray for future ages and future men the love and suffering he found there.

Chapter XII

HER DEATH

THE events of the last months of 1379 had brought no consolation to Catherine, and 1380 seemed to promise nothing better. At the beginning of the year she had a strange new experience. She wrote to Fra Raimondo da Capua about 'wonderful divine mysteries made manifest to me ever since the Circumcision'. Our curiosity about this is to some extent satisfied by Barduccio Canigiani, Catherine's dearest son during these months in Rome. Living under the same roof, he could hourly observe the effect on her of these 'wonderful mysteries'. The letter he wrote to Sister Caterina Petrobuoni 'in the convent of San Pietro a Monticelli near Florence' shortly after Catherine's death is a poem of filial tenderness. He says that ever since the first day of January, although she had still preserved her usual robust and healthy appearance, she had been unable to swallow any food or to drink even a drop of water, 'so that she was tormented by a most violent thirst and such a great inflammation of the throat that it seemed as if she were breathing out fire'. Barduccio tells us no more, but if we search for the cause of this physical deterioration we find it in her state of moral depression. Catherine had believed her efforts were contributing to ecclesiastical reform and the unity of the Church; she had hoped to make the world better; but the world had not changed, or had become even worse than before. The Caterinati had not formed a compact active group that might have supported her in her mission; the enemies of the Church were more powerful than before; the Urbanite College of Cardinals were, on the whole, no better than the Clementines; Urban VI lacked humility and kindness and showed a thirst for power that could not but perturb Catherine; and he was becoming less and less willing to listen to her counsels. When she looked beyond the

Papal circle she saw that in Europe the peoples were endeavouring in every possible way to free themselves from the Pope's authority; everywhere there was a confusion of ideas and purposes; the souls of men were bewildered and rebellious; the Church, instead of progressing towards the unity and universality that Catherine desired, was more derelict than ever: 'We see her all forsaken', she said, and compared the Bride's loneliness to that of her Bridegroom. Was this the result she had expected, and for which she had suffered and striven so much? Her work seemed to have achieved very little. At the beginning of 1380 it was clear to her that in spite of her excellent intentions and the holiness of her cause she had not succeeded in turning the course of human events into the channel she desired. She reflected gravely on the worthlessness of man and his labour. Yet she must have thought: Can man be considered absolutely worthless? Are his own efforts not needed in the work of salvation? How could God save anyone without man's help? 'Thou, O God, dost not save man without man's help.' Man has therefore a positive and necessary value, and so the Saint can believe, without fear, that she also counts for something on this earth. This belief inspires her with new courage and gives her the authority to turn to God saying: 'Thou hast made me without my help, but Thou hast not saved me without my help'. Hence there must be a constant relation between the creator and the creature, and as creatures are of some worth, however little, in God's eyes, He cannot ignore them. He must accept their desires and hear their prayers. Catherine's prayers now became more imploring. They had always been extremely fervent, but she had often ended them with 'this is what I wish', showing great confidence in herself and in human strength; now she set much less store by her own wishes and implored the divine mercy: 'Eternal God, my love, I cry to Thee today, to have mercy on this world'.

In fact, it was only after the failure of various political and human experiments that she realised the ineffectiveness of her own will, and began to renounce it. If with her ardent eloquence, her example and her activity, employed over many years for the world's good, she had not succeeded in implanting in men the Christian ideal, what could she expect to gain in the future by repeating: 'this is what I desire'? So little by little she destroyed in

herself the assertion of her own will—and this was probably the greatest and most difficult renunciation of her life.

She even began to lose hope of exercising her good influence over Urban VI. He needed advice and guidance; he was energetic, believed in the efficacy of the Saints' intervention, was zealous for the honour of the Church—but he was so hard, harsh and unapproachable that even those who loved him abandoned him. He made enemies on all sides. What could Catherine do for him now? Only pray to God to endow his thoughts and actions with wisdom. Therefore, on this first day of January, tormented by physical and moral sufferings, she implored God to protect the Pope: 'inasmuch as Thou hast given Thy Vicar a manly heart, let it be softened with Thy holy humility; I shall never cease from knocking at the door of Thy kindness, my love, begging that Thou will uplift him. Make manifest in him Thy virtue, so that his manly heart may ever burn with Thy holy desire, and be tempered with humility; and may he proceed in his actions with Thy kindness, charity, purity and wisdom, so that he may draw to himself the whole world. Give him inner knowledge of Thy truth, so that he may know himself in himself, as he has been hitherto, and Thee in himself by Thy grace.'

This prayer does not conceal a sorrowful recognition of the Pope's lack of love; but it shows that this judgment must not remain long in her heart, where charity alone must reign. What better purification can she offer than by giving her own body for the good of others? The Church has dangerous foes: 'O God of supreme mercy, save them; punish their sins in me. Here is my body which I acknowledge as coming from Thee, and I now offer it to Thee; may it be as an anvil for Thy beatings, to atone for their sins.' This offer implies the willing acceptance of still further anguish even at this moment when reflections on the decay of the Church were wringing her heart, and her body was tortured with suffering of all kinds. She remained in this state of physical pain and spiritual apprehension for several weeks, during which she continued actively to work, but with her thoughts concentrating more and more on one single idea, clear and fixed, the idea that the Vicar of Christ was about to be abandoned, and opposed, by all. If this came to pass, would it not spell ruin for the Church? This fixed idea pierced ever more deeply into her mind and heart

and occupied all her thoughts. She tried to escape it in prayer, but the idea returned, more insistent, more powerful, more overwhelming than before. It gave her no peace; she could bear it no longer. She tried to shake it off, but the evil power took possession of her soul and became implacable: 'The Pope is abandoned, the Church is doomed'. Catherine was terrified and grief-stricken. The crisis came on January 29th, when, towards the hour of Vespers, she fell and rolled on the ground, seized with agonising pains. She herself says: 'My heart felt such pain that I tore at my robe and rent it, staggering about in the chapel as if I were out of my mind with the anguish. If anyone had held me still I really think I should have died.' The terrible convulsions were followed by hours of complete collapse; but the idea that the Pope had been abandoned by all obsessed her so much that the next day she felt obliged to beg Barduccio Canigiani to take her into her cell to try to write a letter of advice to the Pope, and one to three Cardinals. After having dictated the first her strength failed her and she could do no more. Possibly her letter to Urban is No. 370 of Tommaseo's edition, which treats of themes and counsels that must have been of supreme importance to her in those days.

Urban's grave faults of character might be the cause of irremediable disasters for the Church; therefore it was her duty to warn him, respectfully and with affection. He was impulsive and hasty, whereas the affairs of the Church required careful deliberation; he was adventurous, whereas the Church needed prudence and wisdom. A really holy Pope, Catherine told him, must be prudent and enlightened like Gregory the Great, whom he must imitate. To make promises, as he did, which he could not maintain, was a mark of irresponsibility and selfishness; he must be 'a really holy Pope' and maintain every promise made: 'and I humbly pray you, prudently to aim at promising always only what you can fully maintain, lest harm, shame and confusion should ensue'. He must not use harsh words, that intimidate men and make enemies; he must learn to know the power of gentleness, through which people can be indissolubly bound to us. Did he think that by ill-treating the Romans he would achieve the supremacy he desired? Instead, he would spread gloom and hatred in their hearts, and on the first possible occasion they would rise against him, causing him much injury and therefore grievous

harm to the Church. She feared this last above all else. A revolt of the Romans against the Pope would gravely injure the Church of Rome and, directly or indirectly, would strengthen the Schismatics and their 'devil's church'. The Romans must be kept faithful by all possible means, and therefore she begged Urban: 'You must also recognise the great need, for yourself and for Holy Church, to keep this people in obedience and awe of Your Holiness, for this is the root and principle of our faith'. He must be friendly with the Banderesi, attend their meetings, interest himself in their plans, be affectionate and affable with them: he must 'prudently bind them with the bond of love'.

These counsels, if they had been accepted, would have spared Urban VI and the Church grave injury, but Catherine foresaw that the Pope would ignore her advice, and that evil days would ensue. The idea that the Pope and the Church might be left abandoned in a wilderness, and the presentiment that grave events were impending, threatening ruin for the Church in the near future, filled her with anguish. Therefore, in spite of her physical infirmity, she insisted on writing to Urban, hoping with her frank speech to avert the impending catastrophe. This letter cost her an indescribable effort, so that as soon as she had dictated it she fell ill again and had a terrifying vision which seemed to invade her soul. She saw devils coming from all sides to assail her, with deafening howls. The vision may have been caused by a feverish memory of the Schismatics who were for her 'devils incarnate'; or, more probably, her whole nervous system, already much shaken by her fear of disaster for the Church, was still more affected by the rumours of possible riots of the Romans against Urban VI. These shocks and agitations gave rise to a vision of such torturing power that she fell into a dead faint, so that her intimates, running to her, believed her dead.

But for her this was a sublime moment of respite, as if it were a necessary compensation for the agitation that the diabolical visions had caused her. She herself described the two conditions with great precision: 'And when I had written to Christ-on-earth I could write no more, such were the pains that racked my body. And after a little, there came such a terror of devils that I was deafened and amazed; it was almost as if they were furious with me, as if I, poor worm, had been the cause of snatching out of

their hands what they had so long possessed in Holy Church. And the terror was so great, and the bodily pain, that I wanted to flee from the cell and enter the chapel, as if the cell contained the reason for my pains. So I arose, and being unable to walk, I leant on my little son Barduccio. But at once I was thrown down, and as I fell it seemed to me as if my soul had left my body—not as when, at other times, my soul had left my body and tasted the food of the immortals, receiving this supreme food together with them; this time my soul was like a thing apart because it seemed no longer to exist in my body. I saw my body as if it had been some other body lying there. And when my soul saw the anguish of my companion I wanted to see whether I could control my body sufficiently to be able to say to him: “Do not fear, little son”, and I saw that I could move neither my tongue nor any other member; for it was like a body cut off from life. So I left the body lying there, and my intellect was fixed in the abyss of the Trinity.’

This is a ‘doubling’ such as we have already seen in the ‘Dialogue’, but here it is more emphatic; the spirit not only observes the body from which it has parted, but would like to move it, make it speak and act; the attempt is in vain but serves to prove to the Saint that life belongs absolutely to the spirit. Catherine does not linger to consider her own body; she abandons it when she finds it insensible to her desire, and casts herself wholly into union with the Trinity, in which she finds serenity and perfect bliss, for therein the torments and the diabolical visions vanish at once; there is no more agonising suspense or fear; her spirit can soar at will, and her whole being is enfolded in an infinite peace. The earth now seems far, very far away; yet she does not lose all memory of the earth dwellers, and continues to pray for the salvation of the Church and for her disciples. She seems to be filled with the Holy Spirit and rejoices; but very soon, in some mysterious way, she finds herself once more linked to earthly life, and at once her body begins to breathe again. She has re-entered the world of suffering and sin; the devils reappear, the terror of impending disasters wrings her heart anew, and she sighs out her soul in prayers. From now onwards it is a continual alternation of divine with diabolical moments: the tortures end in sweetness which changes again to fearful visions. This continues for forty-

eight hours, while she lies unconscious. Afterwards, worn out, she returns to herself. Her disciples, however, hardly recognise her; on her face is the impress of the other world.

It was probably at this time that Catherine uttered the prayer: 'O God eternal, O good Master!' The chief requests in this prayer are the same as those Catherine utters in her letter of February 15th, sent to Fra Raimondo da Capua; she prays that the Church may be reformed, protected and victorious, and that her disciples may be enlightened with wisdom, so as to become more perfect and remain in union with each other and with her. In the letter we have also God's reply, which grants her request. Besides reassuring her about the future of the Church and of the Caterinati, God declares that even if the Pope is lacking in self-control he can still discharge the duty of his office; that is, he can sweep out of the Church the elements that make her impure. Urban's roughness and intransigence may even serve this end. Nevertheless, she feels it her duty to warn the Pope to 'be peaceful and grant peace to whoever is willing to receive it'. It is for the Cardinals to make amends for the Pope's defect, so that 'they may all unite together and be like a cloak to cover their father's faulty behaviour'.

But the thought that Rome was about to rebel against the Pope returned insistently to Catherine's mind and made her suffer. On February 2nd she had a most vivid presentiment of the rebellion, and soon afterwards, in fact, rioting broke out. We do not know details about this revolt, because the descriptions we find in Gobelinus, and later in Raynaldus, are partly derived from Fra Raimondo's 'Legend', and partly invented. We do not even know up to what point the worthy Dominican is telling the truth; he was not present at the insurrection and says he got all his information from Catherine. But if so, in which letter? In letter 373 of Tommaseo's edition, or in another, that has been lost? This cannot be ascertained precisely but it seems probable that Fra Raimondo amplified the account Catherine had given him in her letter of February 15th. Certain sentences in the 'Legend', however, are very perplexing. Fra Raimondo's imagination may have transformed the vision of the devils who filled Catherine's cell so that he makes her say: 'I saw in the spirit the whole city full of devils'. This is understandable, but he could hardly have written: 'the populace openly threatened to put the Pope to death' unless

he had been informed of this by Catherine herself in a letter which has not come down to us—for the letter of February 15th makes no mention of this. We know that there were riots against Urban in Rome in February 1380. Catherine asserts this, and it may be deduced that they were the cause of the change of government which took place in Rome on March 1st, and which is reported by Cristoforo da Piacenza. We do not know whether it was a popular rebellion, or a revolt of the Banderesi against the Pope, or an insurrection stirred up by the Clementines. Probably some Roman Clementines may have taken part in the rebellion, but it was chiefly a popular movement led by the Banderesi. The Roman people thought they were badly governed—there was, for example, a scarcity of corn in the city and they had too many rulers—*'tot capita'*—and wanted to elect a Tribune instead of the Banderesi. These latter disagreed with each other and with the Pope, whose interferences in the government of the city infuriated them. Urban opposed the people's intention to elect a Tribune, and wanted the Banderesi to remain, but to be subordinate to himself. He quelled the insurrection and then imposed the dictatorship of two men: Giovanni Cenci, the conqueror of Castel Sant'Angelo, who was perhaps the candidate supported by Catherine, and Nuzio Negri, proposed by Cenci. The Pope gave them full authority to govern Rome; it was a purely nominal authority because, in actual fact, he allowed the two dictators to do nothing without his approval.

The revolt was a grave blow for the Saint, although she had foreseen it. It might mean disaster for the Church; therefore she must intervene without delay. Although physically exhausted, she gathered all her energies together to fight in support of Urban VI. She may even have gone among the rebels to persuade them to stop threatening Christ's Vicar. No document attests this, but we know she had the courage and strength of mind so to do if she thought it necessary. We do know that she prayed to God with continual sighs and tears, imploring Him to make peace between the Pope and the Romans; nor did she cease from praying till she had the inner certainty that all would end peacefully. On February 15th she wrote: 'God has placed His healing ointment on their hearts (the Romans)' and I think that the revolt will end satisfactorily'. The ointment was the fruit of her prayers and of the

spiritual battle she had fought, the worst she had ever known, against the devils who wanted to tear her to pieces.

Victory was won for the Church, but what price was Catherine to pay for it? 'I was to hear Mass every morning at dawn, which you know is impossible for me.' She could no longer walk. But she added blithely and sturdily: 'In obedience to God, all is possible'. In fact she began to rise every morning at dawn to attend Mass and receive Holy Communion. 'After the Communion', wrote Barduccio Canigiani, 'she rose from the ground in such a state that whoever had seen her would have thought her dead, and in this condition dragged herself back to her wretched couch. One or two hours later she rose again and we went to the Church of San Pietro, although this was more than a mile away, and there she began to pray, and stayed thus till Vespers, and finally returned home so worn out that she looked as if she were dead.'

Catherine's life, from then on, was one long agonising expectation. 'My life is spent, and all poured out for this sweet Bride' (the Church). Her task was now to sacrifice herself even more than before for the sake of her fellows. She was ready to endure any martyrdom that might further the salvation of the Papacy; she subdued her body to an incredible extent. Every day she passed long hours in San Pietro, hours of poignant appeal, of bitter weeping. God, speaking to her soul immediately after the diabolical vision, had reassured her about the future of the Church; nevertheless, her fear still persisted and caused her to multiply her prayers and sighs. On her daily toilsome walk to San Pietro, supported by Barduccio Canigiani, she often paused to contemplate a great mosaic by Giotto, set like a symbol of encouragement, over the façade of the Basilica.

In this mosaic the 'navicella', a little ship, floating in a stormy sea, captivates the observer's imagination. Catherine, concerned as she was over the threats to the Church's existence, found in this little ship an image that corresponded to her thought—and very soon there formed in her mind a vision in which she herself and the little ship and the Church all took part. She pondered over this vision until the symbols slowly faded and the little ship became a live thing struggling in stormy seas; it was the Church of her own times, about to suffer shipwreck. She wanted to save it, but her strength failed her. Her anguish increased; the little

ship seemed to move towards her; she felt its weight now on her shoulders, a monstrous weight that grew and grew. Whatever could she, poor wretched little woman, do to support it? She wanted to uphold it in some way, at least for a moment, but her strength was exhausted. She felt weighed down. All her energies, even her last desperate reserves, were powerless; her efforts were in vain. She knew she could do no more. Not wishing to fall under this weight, she tried to resist, at least to remain upright, but it was useless. The little ship, overburdened with troubles, became still heavier; her strength was broken; she fell to the ground, crushed under the unbearable burden, and died.

This melancholy vision warned her of her approaching death, and shows us how intensely she felt concerned with the future of the Church. In the long letter she sent to Fra Raimondo da Capua on February 15th, she had found the strength to make a full report to the man who was father and son to her, master and disciple, about the painful and supreme experiences she had undergone from the first day of the year until the moment she dictated the letter. We have already recounted these experiences; the letter contains also some loving advice, and is tinged with wistfulness. She says: 'Amid these torments, through my own ingratitude I am deprived of the comfort of having my spiritual Father with me.' If Fra Raimondo had been with her in those moments, how willingly would she have poured out to him the story of her ordeals and visions, and with what joy received his words of understanding and consolation! But he was far away, and she could only think of him lovingly and write over and over again: 'Most sweet Father', as if to express to him all the tenderness of her motherly heart. As a last instance of her sublime love for him she gave him advice and a warning. She knew that in the next non-Schismatic Dominican Chapter, to be held in Bologna, Fra Raimondo would be elected General of the Order, and she wished to warn him so that, from now onwards, he might prepare himself to assume his new and grave responsibilities, and become capable of bearing with courage all possible future sufferings. She knew he was easy-going and timid. He must banish all self-love and all timidity; he was needed to defend Christ's cause, and for this heroism was required. He was also given to talking too much; she warned him: 'Be cautious in conversation', and, the better to



make him remember this, she repeated: 'Shun idle and careless talk; be, and show yourself to be, mature in speech as in all else'.

She wanted him to be a great Christian, a man of prayer, and compact of all the virtues. Finally, to show him the trust she placed in him, she chose him to be one of the guardians of her Book, in which, as we have seen, she had poured forth all the best in herself. She appointed four guardians of the Book: Fra Raimondo, Fra Bartolomeo Dominici, Fra Tommaso della Fonte, and Fra Giovanni Terzo, the earliest, the wisest and the most loved of her confessors and teachers. This proves the importance she attached to the 'Dialogue', and her conviction that it was worthy to be preserved, read, approved and divulged by experienced theologians.

Then her thoughts turned to her Caterinati. She had already presented and recommended them to God, begging Him to protect them, but, apart from this divine help, they needed on earth someone to keep them united, to encourage them in affliction, to advise them, and from time to time to revive their faith and love. Who could do this better than Fra Raimondo? 'I beg you also, to be a father and ruler of this Family, in so far as lies in your power, and as a father to keep them in charity and perfect union, so that they may neither be nor remain like little sheep without a shepherd. And I believe I shall be able to do more for them and for you, after my death, than I could do during my whole life.'

Catherine feels and knows that her life approaches its end. Her fastings, sufferings, physical disabilities, terrors and constant tears and sighs had visibly worn out her body. On February 26th she lost the use of her legs and was obliged to remain stretched out on a bed that, according to Bartolomeo Dominici, looked like a tomb. A very narrow straw mattress rested on some boards of wood that formed the bottom of the bed, and all around, following the outline of her body, were wooden sides, that rose to a height above the mattress. Inside this Catherine had to lie quite still, because the slightest change in her position, or attempt to raise her head, gave her atrocious pain. Even in this enforced immobility she suffered pain. Yet her eyes remained clear and serene, and no word of complaint ever issued from her lips; indeed, when she was in pain 'from the soles of her feet to the top of her head' she was heard to utter passionate thanks to God.

Tommaso Petra, Pope Urban's Secretary and a disciple of Catherine's, begged her on March 16th, when her condition was obviously worsening, to transmit to her disciples a spiritual testament. At first Catherine hesitated, then, calling her children and disciples around her, she tried to sum up for them the central themes of her spiritual teaching, the fruit of her ardent religious experience, all that might serve to make them more like herself. It was a sermon which, at least when read in the form in which it has come down to us today, does not excite our admiration. It lacks the inner warmth and the spiritual framework of the letters and the 'Dialogue'; it is like scattered limbs of a lifeless body. The reason may easily be understood. She was at that moment speaking with a great effort and in so faint a voice that many of her words were inaudible. Her listeners had, later on, to piece together these broken phrases and hasty notes and attribute to them a meaning which had to be in accordance with the Saint's teaching, or at least with that part of it with which they themselves were most familiar.

This sermon may strike us as somewhat cold and ineffective, but it must nevertheless have had a great influence over those disciples who heard it. The expression on Catherine's face was sublime, and the silences that separated phrase from phrase and word from word, and sometimes even syllable from syllable, must have been fraught with mystery and suspense for her expectant disciples. The stillness of Catherine's body gave her an appearance of hieratic authority; the thought of her approaching death invested with solemnity her slightest movement and faintest sound. Love irradiated from her and streamed over her disciples, exalting them even in their grief. Her sons and daughters watched with awestruck wonder their Mother's every act, and her words acquired supernatural significance because of the joyful emotion in their hearts.

Although Catherine was now living almost entirely in her own inner world, she was always delighted when one of her spiritual sons came to see her. On the evening of March 24th Bartolomeo Dominici came to Rome from Siena. He had come on business for the Dominican Order, without knowing of Catherine's grave illness. He felt a pang of the heart when he heard of her state, and grieved to see her reduced to skin and bones, and looking as if,

physically, she were already a stranger to this world. He went to her, and anxiously asked her how she felt. After some moments she seemed to awake from her torpor; she opened her eyes, which were smiling. She wanted to speak, but could only make a very slight movement with her lips. Fra Bartolomeo set his ear to her mouth, the better to hear what she said; the murmur was very faint, more like breathing than speech. With an effort of attention, and all his good will, he at last succeeded in understanding something; then they were agreed: the next morning would be Easter Sunday and Fra Bartolomeo would say Mass there, at her bedside, and Catherine, to her great joy, would receive Holy Communion.

The next day, as had been arranged, Fra Bartolomeo came; he heard Catherine's confession as best he could, and gave her absolution, but he despaired of being able to give her Communion because of her absolute immobility. But when the moment for her Communion came, to the astonishment of Fra Bartolomeo and all who were present at the Mass, the Saint arose from her bed and walked steadily to the altar. She received the Communion in two kinds, and was at once rapt in an ecstasy, as had always happened before. When she came to herself her strength deserted her and she would have fallen to the ground if her friends had not caught her and carried her back to her bed, where she returned to her former immobility.

Shortly afterwards she gave Fra Bartolomeo one more proof of her strong will. The Friar was bound to return to Siena but did not want to leave his Mother in that state, and told her so. Catherine, in spite of her grief at parting with her great friend, ordered him to return at once to Siena, where his duties as Prior awaited him, and where he must also prepare to take his part in the General Chapter of the Order, soon to be held at Bologna, where he was to vote for the election of Fra Raimondo as General. Her order was explicit, and Fra Bartolomeo showed himself willing to obey on condition that, as he told Catherine, God would give His consent, that is, would make Catherine visibly recover her health. The next day, when he went to see her, he found her 'merry and bright' as in times past. Could he have had a more evident proof of God's will regarding himself? He set out at once for Siena.

A few days after Bartolomeo's departure there came Stefano

Maconi, the disciple whom Catherine had insistently invited to come to her, and who, for family reasons, had not been able to leave Siena before. As soon as the Saint saw him her angelic smile returned, the smile that won all hearts. In those days her longing to have Maconi with her had been so intense that he had heard her call, while he was at prayer in the Scala Hospital in Siena. A voice had said: 'Go to Rome where your Mother is dying'. He had set out forthwith, and arrived in time to be with her during her last days on earth.

Catherine's body was visibly becoming a skeleton, and all her strength was gone. She knew the end was very near. The crisis began about two hours before the dawn of April 29th. Her faithful gathered around her bed. She begged for absolution from guilt and punishment, and this was immediately granted. She fell into a state of torpor during which her only sign of life was 'a continual sad and faint sighing'. It was thought necessary to give her extreme unction, and the Abbot of Sant'Antimo administered the holy rite. Shortly afterwards her face began to be clouded over and she waved her arms about, an evident sign of an inner struggle. Had she sinister visions, or were the devils returning to attack? Her disciples watched every gesture in anxious suspense; they would have wished to know the mysterious cause of her suffering, to be able to help her, but no word came. Three-quarters of an hour passed. At last the Saint spoke: '*Peccavi, Domine, miserere mei*'. She repeated this again and again. 'And I believe she repeated this more than sixty times, each time raising her right arm and then letting it fall, jarring her bed', Barduccio Canigiani tells us in his affecting account. Then the formula changed, became: '*Sancte Deus, miserere mei*', and this too was repeated many times. What was taking place in her soul? Her disciples still waited in fear and trembling.

Perhaps she was reviewing all her past life, or perhaps it was one more fierce struggle with herself? The rapid changes that could be seen in her features showed some dramatic struggle within. She may have been tormented by the knowledge of her failure to reform the Church and to proclaim a new Crusade against the infidels; she may have been accusing herself of having desired too much; she may have thought she had often acted for the sake of self-glorification. According to Raimondo da Capua,

this last thought was a source of great sadness to Catherine towards the end of her life, and when she lay dying she was obsessed by inner voices that accused her of vainglory. She resisted these voices with all the strength of her soul. At last she cried out emphatically : 'Never for vainglory, always for the true glory and praise of God'. This was like the trumpet cry of conclusive victory. Her weeping ceased and her face became serene. Her eyes, that had been dimmed with tears, became lively and clear once more. The marks of the battle she had fought were smoothed away. All her children around her felt their hearts rejoice: she was their Mother once more, serene even in sadness, transparent of face and thought even in her sorrows.

Alessia, her faithful fellow Tertiary and friend, who was holding the Saint's head in her lap, now helped her to raise herself to a sitting posture, leaning back in her arms. So, surrounded by the delicate affection and concern of her spiritual children, Catherine fixed her gaze on a crucifix, in the centre of a little tablet, covered with relics and images of the Saints, that had been given to her. Looking at Christ, she uttered a prayer of contrition to the Holy Trinity. Then she blamed herself for not having sufficiently accomplished her duty of saving souls, and asked Christ for complete absolution of sins confessed or forgotten. After having received plenary absolution a second time, according to the privileges granted her by Popes Gregory XI and Urban VI, she prayed again, and spoke, but her disciples could only hear a word here and there.

Then she turned to those of her children who had not been there to hear her last sermon, and indicated to them the way they should follow, after her death. Amongst these was Stefano Maconi, and she turned to him, pointing with her finger, saying: 'I command you in God's name, and by virtue of holy obedience, to enter the Carthusian Order, for God has called and chosen you for that Order'.

It was her last act. She said some more kind words to Barduccio, asked for a blessing from her mother Lapa, who knelt down beside her daughter imploring to be blessed by her, and to receive grace from her. Then she prayed for the universal Church and re-affirmed the legitimacy of Urban VI.

All her children around her bed were sobbing with emotion.

The atmosphere was suffused with love. There were moments of solemn silence and painful anxious suspense. Suddenly the word 'Blood' rang out twice in the silence. It was like a stroke of lightning that flashed through the room. Catherine had put into this word her whole life of love and sacrifice, and while its last echoes sank into the silence, the Saint's last breath rose to God.

It was the sixth hour of the Sunday before the Ascension, the 29th April, 1380.

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Abbreviations used:

BS	Bullettino Senese di Storia Patria.
MAH	Mélanges d'Archéologie et d'Histoire.
RMD	Rosario—Memorie Domenicane.
MD	Memorie Domenicane.
SC	Studi Cateriniani.
VC	Vita Cristiana.
SCS	Santa Caterina da Siena.
AD	Année Dominicaine.

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WORKS

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(a) MSS.

Dupré-Theseider has studied 55 MSS. of the Lettere, and considers 27 of these to be genuine collections, to be grouped under three names:

- (1) Neri di Landoccio Pagliaresi.
- (2) Stefano di Corrado Maconi.
- (3) Fra Tommaso di Antonio, commonly called Caffarini.

The first two groups are by far the most important.

- (1) The Palatine MS 3514, National Library, Vienna, was discovered by Dupré-Theseider, who asserts its 'exceptional importance'; the Magliabechiano XXXVIII, 130, National Library, Florence, is 'the oldest MS. of the Lettere of which we have certain knowledge'; the Magliabechiano XXXV, 199, is 'most interesting and of fundamental importance'.
- (2) The most important are: MS. A.D. XIII 34, Braidense Library, Milan; the Varia MS. 155 Royal Library, Turin; the Palatino 57, National Library, Florence, which 'deserves great attention for the accuracy of the text'; the MS. 292, Casanatense Library, Rome, which 'deserves the same consideration as the Viennese MS. and the two Magliabechiani MSS. of Florence'.

(b) *Printed editions*

- 1942 *Epistole utile e devote della beata e serafica vergine S.C. etc.* [31 letters—defective text]. Printed by Zohanne Jacomo de Fontanesi. Bologna.
- 1500 *Epistolae devotissime di S. C. da S. etc.* (353 letters). Collected by *Fra Bartholomeo de Alzano da Bergamo*, edited by Aldo Manuzio.
- This edition was printed three times in Venice 1548, 1562, 1564. In the 18th century G. Gigli, with the co-operation of the Jesuit *Burlamacchi*, produced a new edition. One vol., no. III of the *Opere*, was published in Siena at the printing press of Francesco Quinza, 1713. Another vol., no. II of the *Opere*, was published at Lucca by *Leonardo Venturini*.
- 1842-1844 Reprint by *Sorio* of Gigli's ed. in *Biblioteca Ecclesiastica* (Incomplete).
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(c) *English translation*

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II. *The Dialogo*

- (a) The most important MSS. are the Senese T.II, 9 of the *Bibl. Comunale*, Siena; the Casanatense MS. 292 of the *Bibl. Casanatense*, Rome; the Estense T.5 of the *Bibl. of Modena*.

(b) *Printed editions*

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- 1483, 1494 *Mattheo Codeca da Parma*. Venice.
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- 1912 *Fiorilli*. Bari. 2nd ed. revised by Caramella 1928.
- 1928 *I. Taurisano*. Florence.
- 1937 *Puccetti*. Siena.
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- 1947 *Taurisano*. *Dialogo*. Rome.

(c) *English Translations* of the Dialogo

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